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Huge Yuba Flood Project Breaks Ground

Written by [Mark Hedlund](#), Reporter



YUBA COUNTY, CA - Flood survivors beamed and officials congratulated each other at Wednesday's groundbreaking for a huge new levee project in Yuba County, but one Arboga family is making a big sacrifice for flood protection.



On the same land near Arboga that was inundated with disastrous floods in 1986 and again in 1997, the new project was hailed as the largest setback levee in the state. It will cost \$192 million in state bond money, county funds and developer fees to bring more protection from the Feather River.

"Some communities rise out of the ashes. This community rose out of the water," said Yuba County Supervisor Dan Logue. The new levee will provide 200-year flood protection.

The project will build a new, six-mile long levee from Olivehurst to the Plumas Lakes area, set back about a half mile east of the existing levee along the Feather River. The new levee, at 70 feet high, will be about 10 feet above the highest floodwater levels from 1997. It will also be made with engineered soils to make it much stronger than the century-old sandy levee being replaced.

Less than 100 yards away from the ceremonial groundbreaking is the Anderson family home, which was completely submerged after the levee break January 2, 1997. The greatest loss was the death of Marion Anderson, who was 56 years old when she was apparently swept away trying to evacuate. Her body was later found in a nearby orchard.

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found in a nearby orchard.

Two other people died in that flood.

And while Mary Anderson knows the project is important "for the good of the people," she said the groundbreaking is a bittersweet event. After sitting in the back of the crowd during the ceremony, she choked backed emotion talking about the death of her husband's stepmother. Now, she said, the family is suffering another loss.

"We stand to lose at least half of our land. This is my husband's home. The land has been in the family 105 years," she said.

The new levee will cut right through the Anderson family walnut orchard on the west side of the house. Through eminent domain, she said the Three Rivers Levee Improvement Authority, a joint powers agency of the county and Reclamation District 784, is taking 18.4 acres of the Andersons' property. On that acreage grow 2,800 English walnut trees farmed by the family.

"It's really hard to give away something. It's not easy to let them take your land through eminent domain and watch it happen," she said. "We are all for protecting everyone and helping in anyway we can but it's hard when it involves you in such depth."

Anderson said the value of the land is different for farmers, because the family not only loses the property but future production from the relatively young walnut trees.

"They don't see production. They don't acknowledge it," she said.

Construction is set to begin next week, with the work expected to be completed by the end of the year or early 2009. Most of the funds, about \$138 million, come from Proposition 1E, a flood control measure passed by state voters in 2006. Developers of the nearby Plumas Lake subdivision also paid \$29,000 per home, making up the bulk of county funds contributed.

"I want you to know it has been gut wrenching," Logue told those assembled for the ceremony. "We pulled our hair out, we argued, we fought. We did everything you can imagine to get where we are today. But ladies and gentlemen, we're here."

One of those turning dirt in the ceremony was Duke Griego, whose restaurant on North Beale Road was destroyed in the 1986 floods. A decade later, his Olivehurst home was flooded as well.

"I didn't have nowhere to go. Didn't have any money to get there either," laughed Griego, reflecting on why he stayed through it all.

"We're hoping this 200 flood plan will last for 200 years. And we won't have to put up with this again," he said.

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