

Tours gives insight to levee work

[Michele Perrault/Plumas Lake Life](#)

December 30, 2008 - 6:26PM

As Yuba County continues to move forward with levee improvements on the Yuba, Bear and Feather rivers, county representatives are also making sure they continue to provide residents detailed information along the way.

This past month, county representatives offered up three opportunities for residents to take tours of the levees to see both the improvements made and what is still being worked on in what is a master plan to get the levees up to 200-year protection by the end of 2009. "Yuba County has really stepped out as a leader with these improvements," said Paul Brunner, executive director, Three Rivers Levee Improvement Authority.

The tour began at TRLIA's construction offices where Brunner gave a brief overview of what work had been done to date on the levees as well as addressing concerns from residents that the last of the improvements wouldn't be done in time to avoid being remapped by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

FEMA, which plans to reevaluate and map the areas levees in late October 2009, could possibly result in much higher flood insurance rates for residents if the work is not completed in time. Brunner felt while this was a concern assured tour participants that it is TRLIA's intent to have the work complete in time before FEMA would look to remap the region.

Additionally, there were some concerns from attendees that the current state economic downturn could jeopardize critical funding needed to complete the last of the work on the levees.

"The state has already invested \$80 million in forward funding," said Brunner. "We're just about wrapping up construction for the winter months and are in a good position to meet our financial obligations into March of next year without any further advances in state funding."

The tour itself gave residents a rare opportunity to actually stand on the levees and see for themselves the improvements that have occurred. With three separate stops, residents were given a comparison of work that has already been completed to work that is currently still in progress. One stop at the Bear River levees, where work has already been completed and certified for the past three years, showed the progress made to protect that river as well as to provide a natural environmental preserve for local wildlife. In addition, the group stopped at the current construction site of the levee setback on the Feather River which is the last of the improvements slated to be completed next year. The setback is the first of its kind throughout the state and is being watched carefully as a potentially new innovative way to improve protection of residents and agriculture lands during flood years.

"The current levee along the Feather River still remains our weakest link and even if we simply improved the existing levee it would remain our weakest link, which is why the setback is so critical," said Brunner.

Brunner spent significant time giving tour attendees an explanation as to why the Feather River levee does not work due to its sand-based foundation and explained that by creating the setback levee it would allow the river a wider basin to flow as well as would be creating a new levee on a much sturdier clay-based foundation. This, as well as other explanations and a brief history on levee construction, were all part of the tour that hopefully left attendees with a much better understanding of how levees work to protect them and their homes.

For most people who have a very basic conceptual image of what the levees look like, where they are located in relation to their homes and how they actually work to protect the area, the tour provided an informative opportunity to learn more and be aware of what is taking place in their backyards.

More Tours

TRLIA plans to offer additional tours of Yuba County levee sites in February and March. Residents interested in getting information about the tours or to sign up for one can contact Paul Brunner at TRLIA_s main office at 749-7841.

Plumas Lake correspondent Michele Perrault can be reached at (530) 483-3664 or e-mail her at mperrault@plumaslakelife.com.