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Water, Auburn Dam, Floods & the Economy

By David Lukenbill

There has been a lot of criticism in the media lately, in response to the supporters of building the Auburn Dam to store the vast amounts of water that are now, instead, flowing out to sea.

The critics say, as today's *Sacramento Bee* editorial did.

"It never fails that, during wet years or dry ones, the water buffaloes resume their stampede for more taxpayer-subsidized water projects. During a single year of drought, they purchase billboards warning of "dust bowls" if someone else doesn't help them build a new reservoir. And now that California has been blessed with a prodigious snowpack and plentiful rainfall, the same crowd is bemoaning all the water in the Sacramento River that "is just washing out to sea."

What critics forget is that the primary need for the Auburn Dam—much more important than water storage—is protection from life and property threatening floods.

They should remember that Sacramento is the most flood prone major river city in the country.

The *Sacramento Bee* did a story January 14, 2011 reporting on the results of a recent US Geological Survey Report and wrote:

"In the study, researchers used computer models and a composite of three historical storms to estimate a worst-case event: a torrent of tropical rain for nine straight days. It amounts to a 500-year storm. In the lingo of disaster managers, that does not mean it happens only once every 500 years, but that it has two-tenths percent chance of occurring in any given year. The Central Valley and the Sacramento region are likely to suffer the worst effects because they lie within a funnel for the state's biggest rivers."

In the same story, the Bee notes some of the impacts in Sacramento County include 527,885 evacuations, 200 days before waters recede from the Pocket area, and $29.1 billion property loss.

There is a graph on our **blog site** which says it all.

The print is small, but the cities listed, from the left are, Tacoma, St. Louis, Dallas, & Kansas City, who all have met the gold standard of a 500 year level of protection.

While New Orleans has, after their recent improvements, met a 250 year level of protection and Sacramento, in the red at a 100 year level, will have a 200 year level after the Folsom Dam improvements.

The numbers on the left representing the level of coverage, starting from the bottom, are 85, 100, 200, 300, 400, 500 & 600.

When a flood control system provides 100 year flood protection, it means there is a one in 100 chance that a storm will occur that is beyond the capacity of levees and reservoirs to contain. Therefore, 200 year flood protection means there is a 1 in 200 chance that a storm may occur which the system couldn't handle, and 500 year protection means there is only a one in 500 chance that a storm will

overwhelm a system.

Giving Sacramento a 500 year level of flood protection will more than compensate for the construction costs of the Auburn Dam, estimated at between 5 - 10 billion dollars.

The water storage, hydroelectric power, and the economic benefit that will arise from the recreational usage of the new lake created behind Auburn Dam, are supplemental benefits.

So, of course, during rich rain years, Auburn Dam advocates will remind the public of the water storage capability of the dam, but we know that the primary reason for building Auburn Dam is to save the lives and property of those who might lose both when a 500 year flood hits Sacramento.

The major concern of the American River Parkway Preservation Society about this issue, beyond being Sacramento residents and wanting adequate flood protection for our community, is that the Auburn Dam will provide enhanced protection for the land and habitat of the American River Parkway and provide greater control maintaining the optimal level of water flow and water temperature for the salmon in the Lower American River.

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