

- Seth Nidever Staff Reporter

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CORCORAN – As work continues on a \$14 million project to raise a flood control levee around Corcoran in anticipation of possible flooding from a giant snowpack, the work is being paid for with IOUs.

The Cross Creek Flood Control District is issuing the IOUs, also known as registered warrants, to contractors that are doing the actual dirt-hauling, grading and surveying to raise the levee by four feet, according to Dustin Fuller, district manager.

The levee has **sunk in recent years due to subsidence**, which is the phenomenon of the ground sinking due to groundwater pumping for agricultural use.

The levee is being raised in anticipation that runoff from the snowpack in four river watersheds – the Kings, Kaweah, Tule and Kern – could flood the old Tulare Lake bottom, causing water to back up against the levee.

Now comes the question of how to ultimately pay the IOUs for the massive project, which started in February and isn't likely to be completed until at least the end of April.

Fuller said the district depleted its financial reserves in 2015 the last time it raised the levee – a project that was also made necessary because of subsidence.

The district is looking into charging property owners in Corcoran and surrounding areas a fee to help pay for the project.

The assessment would show up as an increase on property tax bills.

The last time an assessment was done in the district was in 2000/2001, and it was to pay for levee maintenance, according to Fuller.

The district has begun the long and complicated process of doing it again this year.

In one of the first stages, the Kings County Board of Supervisors last month appointed three commissioners to do an assessment report for the district.

Fuller said that the report, which he hopes will be completed by May 1, will recommend different assessment rates for different benefit zones, defined as areas within the district that are at more or less risk for flooding.

Fuller said Corcoran property owners will have a chance to vote on any proposed assessment.

Fuller said the benefit zones haven't been updated since 1984, which was before California State Prison Corcoran and California Substance Abuse and Treatment Facility Corcoran were built.

Fuller said that the two prisons, which are south of town, are closer to the old Tulare Lake bottom and potentially at greater risk of flooding than the town itself.

Fuller said it's possible that the two state prisons and agricultural land owners at risk of flooding could end up shouldering most of the

financial burden for the levee-raising project, thereby minimizing the impact on most Corcoran residents and homeowners.

"That may or may not be the case, according to the report," Fuller said. "That report is crucial. Our goal is not to put an actual financial burden on the average person."

Fuller said the district is also looking into getting funding through state and federal emergency agencies.

On March 7, Kings County was one of 53 California counties included in a **major disaster declaration issued by Gov. Jerry Brown** in response to heavy rain and snowfall in January and February.

On Sunday, the Federal Emergency Management Agency announced that President Donald Trump had included Kings on a **list of 43 counties made eligible for cost-sharing federal assistance** "for emergency work and the repair or replacement of facilities damaged by severe winter storms."

Fuller said the district might be able to get funding through FEMA for "hazard mitigation," defined by the agency as "any action taken to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and property from natural disasters."

According to the agency, generally 15 percent of the total package of aid provided by FEMA after a presidential disaster declaration is set aside for hazard mitigation.

"That's an avenue we're strongly pursuing," Fuller said. "The burden on the [Corcoran area] taxpayer could be nil or minimal."

Meanwhile, Kings County Supervisor Richard Valle has scheduled a town hall meeting Thursday to discuss the potential flooding impacts.

Valle said the meeting will start at 6 p.m. at the Corcoran Technology Learning Center, located at 1101 Dairy Ave. in Corcoran.

"People are asking us, 'Is the town going to flood?'" Valle said. "The rumor mill has created a lot of anxiety and fear."

Valle said people will be able to ask questions at the meeting that will be answered by officials who are expected to attend, including someone with expertise in flood insurance.

There is no water lapping against the levee yet, but officials are keeping an eye on the weather.

The peak snowmelt runoff date on the Kings River historically happens anywhere from late May to early July, according to Steve Haugen, Kings River Water Association watermaster.