

FEATHER RIVER RECOVERY ALLIANCE: UPDATE OF ACTIVITIES

(March, 2024)

www.notjustaspillway.com

In February 2023 we provided a comprehensive report of the activities and priorities over the last few years as well as what we expected to achieve in 2024. This report focuses on the achievements since last February and what we hope to achieve in the next twelve months.

Over the last few years, we have worked closely with the California National Resources Agency (CNRA) which is responsible for the operation of the Oroville Dam Advisory Commission (OCAC), chaired by the Secretary of the CNRA, Wade Crowfoot. OCAC involvement has been critical in achieving our objectives which included:

1. Accurate inundation maps for Oroville.

The final drafts, paid for by the DWR and prepared under the control of the Sutter Butte Flood Control Agency (SBFCA) will be available this month. The preliminary drafts conformed to the actual experience during the flood over New Year in 1996/7. None of the maps used previously have been accurate; so, this is a major step forward achieved with the support of Wade Crowfoot. After the spillway collapse the lack of accurate inundation caused the evacuation of probably twice the number of people who could have been flooded. Accurate maps will prevent unrealistic assumptions about the extent of flooding during high releases. The maps are expected to show that releases from the Dam of 200,000 fps or over the City of Oroville will be flooded below the railway lines; so, releases this high must be avoided.

2. An appraisal of the levees around Oroville which will lead to their renovation.

SBFCA and the City of Oroville have embarked on a multi-year project to bring the levees, which do not appear to have been thoroughly checked and certified for decades. Unless this is done now, the City of Oroville will be classified as a flood zone in the next few years. This project is an extension of the work being undertaken with the support of the DWR to open up the Oroville Wildlife Area (OWA).

3. Opening up the 12,000-acre OWA so that it acts an holding area during periods of high release from the Dam.

This project, which includes a primitive riverside camp site at the outlet, improved access to the river and spawning ponds for salmon, was promoted by consultants for the DWR following the 2017 incident. It is doubtful whether it would have been commissioned without pressure from the OCAC.

4. Establishing a de facto steering committee of Commissioners for the OCAC

The CNRA has come to rely on us to advise for community input for agendas. We submit questions, based on safety or risk reduction, for speakers. If our questions are not answered we follow up so that they are either answered by email or in a side meeting. This develops the transparency about the operation of the dam and reservoir necessary

for an understanding of issues which need to be addressed. This is also helping build relationships with DWR staff who are often sympathetic to our concerns. Our questions about Project Selection and Budgeting, the topics for presentations at the March 2024 meeting are attached.

Last year, the OCAC (www.resources.ca.gov) filed a report on the first 3 years of its activities. The appendix includes comments from FRRRA members and associates which highlight the problems in its early years. These concerns have largely been addressed. The meetings now focus on important topics, most involving risk reduction and downstream safety.

In 2023 we filed a protest to FERC objecting to the issue of a long-term license before the 2007 Settlement Agreement was renegotiated. This remains an important objective. We continue to encourage local agencies to follow ORAC in withdrawing from the Settlement Agreement, which after 12 years is out of date and anyway has always been rejected by a number of stakeholders including the County. The OCAC is considering putting the Settlement Agreement and Relicensing on the agenda for the July meeting. It is possible that this will lead to an opportunity to resolve several of the unsettled disputes and mutual distrust which the Dam and its operation has created since it was built and to a good faith renegotiation of the Settlement Agreement.

Our immediate priority is providing input to the ongoing revision of the Water Control Manual (WCM) which was last revised in 1970. The United States Army Corps of Engineers is more than half way through a 5-year revision process. There has not been any Stakeholder consultation or input, apart from the DWR. The WCM is the rule book followed by operators of Dams which settles such things as the space left unfilled during the rainy season (the flood pool) and how snow melt should be factored into this. There is evidence that the inadequacy of the flood pool and the miscalculation of the snow melt contributed to the emergencies in 1997 and 2017. So, following a presentation to the OCAC by the local Director of the USACE division which deals with dams and with the support of the OCAC, the FRRRA on behalf of a group of stakeholders, has submitted a list of questions to the USACE. After the answers to these questions have been digested, it is planned that there will be a meeting of stakeholders with the USACE to make sure that downstream communities' objectives are addressed in the revisions to the manual. The questions to which the USACE is preparing answers are attached.

Also attached is an analysis of the lessons learned following the 1997 and 1986 floods. Understanding these floods is critical to any WCM revision and we have not been able to find any simple comprehensive explanation. We have asked the DWR for this. The 2017 spillway incident has been extensively studied and the lessons thoroughly debated - but as is implied by our web site name www.notjustaspillway.com concerns about the dam are not primarily about the spillway or isolated to the 2017 incident.

In 2023, the FRRRA, in accordance with its founding charter 'To hold the DWR Accountable', has contributed to steps that are necessary for the recovery from the spillway fiasco and, indeed, from the shadow that the dam has cast over Oroville since its construction. Our aim is to

encourage trust in the DWR and the DWR is becoming more worthy of our trust. The support of Bill Connelly has been critical to any success we have had. Without the support of Dave Pittman, the several projects to improve flood protection around Oroville would have been unlikely to get off the ground.

The FRRRA, a 501 C public purpose charity, did not raise any money and spent less than \$2,000 in the last year. The organization is managed by volunteers who do the work. However, our effectiveness is enhanced by our ability to raise funds for priming funding for projects that are necessary but cannot find immediate financial support. This was the case with the preparation of accurate Inundation Maps which we offered to finance before the DWR stepped in.

We hope we can continue to be effective without significant funding. But we ask those concerned about improving both the DWR's operation of the Dam and how the DWR deals with the community, particularly recreation, to look favorably on funding any project for which we find we need support in future.