

Sutter County wants floodplain relief

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For agricultural landowners in regions like south Sutter County, a floodplain designation is a three-part blow:

- The Federal Emergency Management Agency says your land has a special hazard for flooding.**
- You don't have enough money to make it not so.**
- The designation means your property can't be developed or enhanced further in a cost-effective way.**

The Sutter County Board of Supervisors took a possible first step toward changing such a process Tuesday night, committing \$40,000 to form a coalition to convince floodplain designators of the need for regulatory relief.

"If you have a rice dryer, you can't really dry flood-proof it in a way to satisfy FEMA and still have a dryer that really works," said Supervisor James Gallagher, whose district includes small communities affected by such regulations.

As described by Gallagher and Sutter-Butte Flood Control Agency Contract Executive Director Bill Edgar, the county's contribution would be paired with other agencies, locally and elsewhere, to push FEMA.

By changing the regulation, Edgar said, a farmer who wanted to build a new barn, or other structure, on land under a special flood-hazard designation could have an easier time doing so.

Such a change would benefit not only flood-prone areas in Sutter County and the rest of the Central Valley, but potentially agricultural areas in the Midwest also often inundated with floodwaters.

FEMA is in the midst of discussions in Washington, D.C., over its future funding, creating a window of opportunity now, said Supervisor Stan Cleveland.

"We're the right ones to be carrying this at this time," Cleveland said, because the county has an established relationship with agencies like FEMA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The \$40,000 would come from either a designated county fund for flood control, or a fund of money paid by energy company Calpine Inc., for the same purpose.

Pat Miller of the Sutter County Taxpayers Association said she'd warn against using money designated for general flood control to push the regulation-changing proposal.

"We support the effort," she told the board. "Be careful about where you get the money for this effort."

Gallagher said Calpine, which operates a natural-gas facility in the county, supported the idea.

Supervisor Jim Whiteaker, however, said he had a different concern. While groups from the Yuba-Sutter Farm Bureau to the Colusa County Board of Supervisors have expressed support for the idea, he said, he worried the financial side was being borne by the county alone.

"It's nice to have words, but show me the money," he said.

The board approved the expenditure on a 5-0 vote.