YUBA CITY, CA - A $312-million levee repair project started Wednesday in Sutter County along the west side of the Feather River.

Almost 60 years ago, 38 people died when a section of the levee, called Shanghia Bend, gave way and sent water rushing into the farming town of Yuba City. Approximately 6,000 homes were damaged or destroyed. Since then, the levee has failed two other times - in 1986, in Yuba County and in 1997 in Sutter County. In all three cases, the failures happened because of seepage, both under the levee and through it. The Sutter Butte Flood Control Agency is responsible for fixing the 44 miles of levees along the west side of the Feather River.

The project started in the fall of 2010. The condition of the levees had to be evaluated and designs for the new levee had to be developed. The project will be completed in two phases. The first phase will improve 15 miles of levee from Live Oak south to Shanghai Bend. The other portions will be completed from Live Oak to Thermalito Afterbay, a 19-mile span, and then from Shanghai Bend to Star Bend. Most of the project consists of building slurry walls, which could be as deep as 120 feet in some areas. The Feather River West Levee Project will provide protection to more than 90,000 residents in Sutter and parts of Butte counties. It will also save residents tens of millions of dollars in insurance costs. Right now, the residents are in a flood plain. The levees do not meet the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) 100-year flood protection plan, or the state's 200-year flood protection plan.

Francis Silva was on hand at the ground-breaking ceremony for the project. Silva received an award from Congressman John Garamendi for the work he has done on several levee control boards. Silva was patrolling the levees when it
breeched on December 24, 1955. "I saw this break," Silva said. "I was here at Shanghai Bend at 11 o'clock that night and it broke at midnight, about an hour after I left here." Silva said it was the most devastating thing he'd see in his 91 years. "I came back on Tuesday and got in a boat and rowed over the whole area that was flooded." Silva believes the repairs will keep history from repeating itself. The repairs along the levee are expected to be complete by 2015.

News10/KXTV