

July 1, 2014

Dear Editor:

Following the Big Sioux River high water event of two weeks ago, several individuals have advocated for changes to the Big Sioux Flood Control Project (BSFCP). While the City of North Sioux City certainly appreciates these concerns, it is important to understand that the levee/channel system is an intricate network, and that changes to the North Sioux City levee could negatively impact private property owners and other communities to our north and south.

Recently we have heard a lot about the flood of record in 1969, which was significant for at least two reasons.

First, the obvious damage caused by the record high flows.

Second, the motivation provided to create and construct the Big Sioux Flood Control Project (BSFCP) to protect a portion of North Sioux City and the Riverside Area of Sioux City.

While the record flood of 1969 gets all of the attention, it was the several floods prior to 1969 that provided the economics to construct the Flood Control Project. Several smaller floods damaged portions of Riverside as well as North Sioux City (south of River Drive and on some occasions Main Street). Flood Control Projects are evaluated on a cost vs benefit basis to determine their feasibility. Smaller floods that occur more often contribute significantly to create the financial 'Benefit' to offset the 'Cost' of construction of the Flood Control Project. Large floods that create a single large damage event may not have the damage 'Costs' of several smaller floods.

When the BSFCP was evaluated, the 'Cost' of extending the levee system further north was not offset by the anticipated 'Benefits'. In order to construct a Flood Control Project, the cost needed to be reduced. Thus, the levee stops at Exit 4. Some would correctly argue the economics of flood protection has changed, as the value of homes and school structures along North Shore has increased significantly since the early 70's. The new value of 'Benefit' to homes and structures must be evaluated against the new 'Cost' of flood protection construction to obtain federal assistance for a change to the BSFCP. The threat of flood waters flowing over I-29 into McCook Lake and Lake Goodenough was visible on Friday June 20, 2014, at 1:00 p.m., but the damage did not occur for the Benefit vs. Cost analysis.

The new record flood of 2014 has repeated the two significant results mentioned previously for the event of 1969.

First, the damage was terrible to all of those who were in its path.

Second, we have been shown the potential danger. The flood was either on our property; or too close for comfort.

Some would say the BSFCP should be modernized. Several years ago, the City studied several ways to improve the current flood control project.

Option One: Convey the record flood through the BSFCP to the Missouri River. This option would extend the levee north and block the water from flowing over I-29 and into McCook Lake and Lake Goodenough. Studies showed the additional water volume would raise the water level in the BSFCP requiring modifications to the existing levees and additional flooding of the Iowa side of the Big Sioux River. It is beneficial to compare the height of the levee on the South Dakota side of the Big Sioux with the property on the Iowa side. In 1969 and this year, Sioux City constructed temporary levees on interior surfaces in Riverside. Additional flow through the BSFCP increases the damage to the Iowa side of the River. This proposal, would most likely meet some opposition.

Option Two: Convey the water through a channel to old Lake Goodenough and through the Adams Nature area to the Missouri River. This option requires road reconstruction and flood easements from both private land owners and the State of South Dakota. Assistance would be required from other governmental agencies in order to acquire the property for this option.

Option Three: Construct a levee with a channel to McCook Lake and to Lake Goodenough to allow the existing flood flow to proceed as with the existing conditions, but control the flow routes to reduce the damage. This option requires an outlet to both lakes, right of way for the channels, and road modifications. To construct this option, condemnation of right of way is required.

As we consider the options for flood control, it is beneficial to remember there are two states, two counties, two cities and two FEMA regional offices to review and approve any change to the BSFCP.

North Sioux City and Union County previously worked on a plan to control the major flood events. North Sioux City has funded studies needed for the BSFCP modification, but additional study is needed. The public review and input process is still required. Several of the land owners that would be impacted were willing to provide the property at no cost or at a reasonable cost. However, not all of the land owners were willing to participate. While some people saw the need for the modification to the BSFCP, not all saw the need.

I can assure you that the City of North Sioux City is very aware of the significance of this issue, and will continue to work with the appropriate county, state and federal officials in a coordinated effort to identify a long-term solution. Now is not the time for political posturing. This is a serious and complex issue that warrants serious and complex thought and planning.

Don Fuxa, Mayor

City of North Sioux City