

Water resources bill can't wait; Congress needs to vote

By Adrian Covert

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Most of Silicon Valley lies at, below or barely above sea level. In the face of an extreme weather event, the only thing standing between Silicon Valley and a surging San Francisco Bay is a crumbling network of salt pond levees, some of which were built a century ago. The Bay Area Council Economic Institute estimates a 150-year-storm event could wreak more than \$10 billion in damages to the Bay Area at large, with about \$6 billion of the damage centered in Santa Clara County, the heart of Silicon Valley.

That is why it's so important for Congress to pass, and President Obama to sign, the bipartisan [Water Resources Development Act](#). The bill authorizes \$4 billion worth of federal flood protection projects across California, including the \$174 million South Bay Shoreline project, arguably the region's most badly needed flood-control project.

The recent tragedy in Louisiana is a stark reminder of what's at stake.

Livingston Parish, just east of Baton Rouge, was drenched in an astonishing 26 inches of rain in just 72 hours. Rivers spilled over into neighboring communities at levels expected only once every 500 years. The storm so far has killed at least 13 people and forced more than 8,000 into shelters. As of Tuesday afternoon, 40,000 homes had been inundated by floodwaters, compelling Obama to declare the region a federal disaster area.

We don't even have an estimate of the potential damage a storm of that magnitude would wreak on the Bay Area. Located within the region's 100-year floodplain is \$46 billion worth of infrastructure, including 800 miles of roads and highways, 46 wastewater treatment plants, 35 schools, 15 hospitals and much more. A 500-year storm is almost incomprehensible.

The South Bay Shoreline Project would result in nearly 4 miles of new engineered levees behind more than 15,000 acres of restored wetland habitat. This combination of "green" and "gray" infrastructure uses an approach to providing flood protection at lower cost while improving the surrounding natural environment for birds, fish and public health and recreation. The first phase of the project would defend the homes and businesses in the community of Alviso, and extend westward to defend the sewage, drinking water, electrical and transportation infrastructure that the region relies on.

What's more, Bay Area residents are bringing their own cash to the table. Santa Clara County voters have already approved \$15 million for implementing the project, and more than 70 percent of voters across all nine Bay Area counties affirmed their willingness to invest in improving the health and safety of San Francisco Bay in June by passing Measure AA — a

\$12 parcel tax that will raise \$500 million over the next 20 years for projects like the South Bay Shoreline.

House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell need to hear from all Americans that protecting the nation's residents and economy from flood disaster can't wait: Schedule a vote on the Water Resources Development Act without delay.

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