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TRLIA KICKS OFF 200-YEAR YUBA GOLDFIELDS LEVEE CONSTRUCTION

MARYSVILLE, CA – The Three Rivers Levee Improvement Authority (TRLIA) is kicking off construction of a new levee that, once completed this year, will cap off a highly successful, $500 million program to reduce flood risk for an area previously devastated by flooding, most notably in 1986 and 1997. The new 2.5-mile long levee, which will tie into the previously improved Upper Yuba River levee, is designed to prevent water from the Goldfields from inundating the communities of Linda, Olivehurst, Arboga and Plumas Lake and comply with state requirements for 200-year flood protection.

In 2004, TRLIA embarked on ambitious program to improve 29 miles of Reclamation District 784 levees along the Yuba, Feather and Bear Rivers and the Western Interceptor Canal to reduce flood risk and address increasingly strict state and federal regulations for flood protection. The bulk of the program was finished by 2012 when TRLIA completed an extension of the Upper Yuba River levee from Simpson Lane to the Goldfields. Since that time, TRLIA has improved the Western Pacific Interceptor Canal to meet the new State 200-flood control criteria, and has been working on the engineering, design, land acquisition and environmental permitting for the new 2.5-mile long Goldfields levee.

The majority of the project funding, 85 percent, is being paid for by the Department of Water Resources using statewide bond funding. The remaining local cost share comes from a combination of funding from local developers and proceeds of a joint Yuba County and Yuba County Water Agency bond sale.

“We are deeply appreciative of the funding support provided by the state and local community. Our experience with flooding taught us that the unimaginable can and does happen,” said TRLIA Board Chair and Yuba County Supervisor Andy Vasquez. “We’ve been relentless in our efforts to improve these levees over the past 16 years so that we can avoid a repeat of the 1986 and 1997 flood events. As a result, we have one of the best levee systems in California.”

The Federal Emergency Management Agency recently approved accreditation for TRLIA-improved levees for a 15-year period. As a result, the majority of properties in Linda, Olivehurst, Arboga and Plumas Lake will remain in a FEMA low-to-moderate risk flood zone through 2034. During that period, property owners will maintain eligibility for lowest-cost flood insurance and be free of any building restrictions. Reclamation District 784 operates and maintains the levees with assessments paid by properties that benefit from improved flood protection.

“The start of the Goldfields levee project is an opportunity to reflect on all we’ve accomplished to date,” said TRLIA’s longtime Executive Director Paul Brunner. “By getting a jump start on levee improvements in 2004, we were primed and ready to secure available state bond funding for flood risk reduction when it became available in 2007. TRLIA’s work has directly improved the rivers’ passage of flood waters and added expansive ecological areas by expanding the floodways for both the Bear...
and Feather Rivers. This work has changed the future for Yuba County and provides unparalleled flood protection for residents in the Reclamation District 784 service area.”

TRLIA has, and continues to partner closely with Yuba County, Reclamation District 784, the Yuba Water Agency, the California Department of Water Resources, the Central Valley Flood Protection Board, FEMA and the US Army Corps of Engineers on its levee improvement program. For more information, please contact TRLIA Executive Director Paul Brunner at (530) 749-5679.

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Additional Background:

Levees are designed to reduce the risks associated with flood events. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requires that levees meet design, construction and operation and maintenance standards to protect against a 100-year flood event, or a storm that has a one percent chance of happening in any given year. In California, the state goes one step further in requiring that levees in urban areas protect against a 200-year flood event, or a storm that has a one-half percent chance of happening in any given year.

TRLIA, a joint powers authority of Yuba County and Reclamation District 784, was formed in 2004 to finance and construct levee improvements to meaningfully reduce flood risk and ward off FEMA-imposed regulations for properties in high-risk flood zones. These include mandatory, higher-cost flood insurance and building restrictions that can result in complete moratoriums on new and replacement construction. TRLIA embarked on a four-phase program resulting in approximately $500 million in levee improvements, approximately 60 percent of which is being paid for by the state. The local share is largely being covered through a prior bond sale by Yuba County and Yuba Water Agency, for which Yuba Water Agency continues to pay approximately $5.5 million per year in bond debt.