



## Levee completion speed wows Corps colonel

[By Ben van der Meer/Appeal-Democrat](#)

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As he looked over the nearly football-field wide setback levee on the Feather River Tuesday afternoon, Col. William Leady said what he was seeing isn't the common practice with flood control nationwide.

"This is about pragmatic people pushing things through," said Leady, district engineer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Sacramento office, as he toured south Yuba County's improved levee system for the first time. "It's uncommon for this to happen this fast."

Officials with Yuba County, the Yuba County Water Agency and the Three Rivers Levee Improvement Authority explained to Leady how, after devastating floods in 1986 and 1997, residents and leaders made a vow of "never again."

The vow went into action in 2004, when TRLIA was formed.

But Yuba County Supervisor John Nicoletti and County Administrator Robert Bendorf said even then, nothing was guaranteed.

"We've always been just about a buck and a half in front of the bills, and a few seconds from the project collapsing," Nicoletti said, noting among other challenges, the housing market collapsed while the new levees were being built, potentially undermining the necessary financing.

Leady pointed out levee projects also usually take a long time because of necessary hydraulic studies, environmental concerns, complications when American Indian remains are found, and other issues Yuba County experienced.

"There was a 'let's get it done' approach here," observed Leady, who took the helm at the Sacramento office a month ago. "Let's get everyone at the table and work out the issues."

The setback levee itself can help other agencies in the Yuba-Sutter region who are upgrading flood control, he said, because the acreage between the river and the levee is riparian habitat favored by environmental groups and is added protection.

Still, Leady said, Yuba County's levees can't be called successful until a rainy deluge puts them to the test.

"I think all the agencies here are confident these are well engineered," he said. "Certainly, they're better engineered than the old levees are."

*CONTACT Ben van der Meer at 749-4709 or [bvandermeer@appealdemocrat.com](mailto:bvandermeer@appealdemocrat.com).*

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