Major disaster could wipe out key levee system

Dan Walters is sounding a wake-up call for his eighteenth time in his recent column about a possible disaster in northern California if a major flood were to overwhelm the century-old levee system that has not been kept up to the standards designed to protect people living in flood-prone areas.

The cause for this threat is the same as in New Orleans.

State and local officials have been warned by resource managers and engineers, but they can never pray the money loose to fix the problem until a major disaster happens.

Many lives were lost before Shasta, Oroville and Jocassee dams were built.

Rain storm flooding is not the only threat to the levee system in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, which serves as the source of drinking water for millions of Californians from Silicon Valley to San Diego, and also the supply for much of our valley agriculture.

A major earthquake in the Bay Area or in the Delta, where there are known earthquake faults, could wipe out Delta levees causing both farming and residential areas in the Delta to fill up with salt water that would rush in from San Francisco Bay.

Once salt water is in there, it would take months for it to be displaced by fresh water to make it suitable for the citizens to use.

Are state and federal officials failing to do something that would prevent this from happening? No, this disaster could happen in the Delta, either from a major flood or an earthquake.

With the current statistics, recovery would be very slow. The Califoried South Delta facilities now agreed to, and a “dual system” being planned to take the place of the “peripheral canal” would make recovery faster.

Department of Water Resources Director Lester Snow needs a green light to fast-track new facilities in the Califoried plan that is now approved, but whose implementation is being strangled by slow funding and bureaucratic/environmental inertia.

Dan Walters does the public a real service by keeping us informed about so many issues that the politicians in Sacramento fail to come to grips with.

Stu Pyle is the former general manager of the Kern County Water Agency. Community Voices is an expanded commentary that may contain up to 500 words. The Californian reserves the right to reprinted commentaries in all formats, including on its Web page.