

Flood reduction group debuts

300 attend presentation in Findlay

By JOHN GRABER
STAFF WRITER

More than 300 people heard some straightforward talk about flood reduction Wednesday night, as the Northwest Ohio Flood Mitigation Partnership introduced itself to the public in Findlay.

When one audience member asked why it is expected to take so long to make physical changes to the Blanchard River, Army Corps of Engineers project manager Phil Berkeley stood up and said, "Because we are the federal government and it's a lot of money."

That simple answer drew laughter and applause, though he followed it up by explaining the Corps is working on a lot of projects; there are public comment periods that must be adhered to; funding to be secured; and any proposed flooding solution has to be checked against a myriad of environmental laws for compliance.

The audience at Winebrenner Theological Seminary Convocation Center also got some answers it probably didn't want to hear.

Berkeley told them getting flood reduction work done in five years is optimistic.

"(The year) 2013 is a very ambitious schedule," he said. "It can be done. I have seen it done before, but it is ambitious."

The Northwest Ohio Flood Mitigation Partnership hosted the event to explain what it is and what it's doing.

The partnership is a group of businesses, located in the Blanchard River watershed, which have banded together to try to speed up the Army Corps' timeline for studying the flood-



A CROWD ASSEMBLED Wednesday night at Winebrenner Theological Seminary Convocation Center in Findlay, to hear the Northwest Ohio Flood Mitigation Partnership introduce itself to the public.

Photos by KENT TARBOX / for The Courier

ing problem and making changes to the river.

The nonprofit organization was organized by Marathon Petroleum President Gary Heminger, and has a three-year expected life span.

Flooding isn't just a problem for individuals living in the watershed, partnership President Tony Iriti said Wednesday.

"If employees can't get to work because of floodwaters, businesses have to shut down," he said. Also, any business looking to locate in the area may be scared off by the flooding problem.

"The one thing the private

sector understands is this flooding hurts everybody," Iriti said.

The partnership's members aren't going to cover the cost of flood reduction construction projects. The group's purpose is to speed up the process so construction gets done as quickly as possible.

Paying for the work was addressed several times during Wednesday's meeting.

The federal government's share of the cost is expected to be around \$93 million, while Findlay will probably have to come up with around \$50 million, Iriti said.

The city is socking away about \$600,000 a year right now,

but is going to have to find ways to come up with much more, Iriti said.

Voters will likely be asked to pass some kind of tax, and Mayor Pete Sehnert said it will "come down to the resolve of the people."

Hancock County Commissioner Ed Ingold spoke about the city of Grand Forks, N.D., which suffered a worse flood in 1997 than Findlay's deluge last August.

"They basically had to evacuate the town for about six months before they could bring anybody



PHIL BERKELEY, an Army Corps of Engineers project manager, said making physical changes to the Blanchard River will take a long time, and cost lots of money.

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