



Everything New Orleans

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Flood-protection plans put on hold

Feds may demand money for levees

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BATON ROUGE -- The Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority on Friday delayed a decision on how to spend \$300 million set aside for flood-protection projects because of fears the state will need that money to pay a much larger levee bill to the federal government.

The state will soon have to pay \$1.8 billion in matching funds for \$12.9 billion in federal money being spent to rebuild New Orleans area levees. State officials have asked Congress to spread out payments on that money for 30 years, but so far have been rejected.

"In 2010, the state could be responsible for \$1.1 billion for that year alone, which would represent a third of the state's discretionary budget," said authority Chairman Garret Graves.

Graves said the Army Corps of Engineers may delay the match requirement for a year, but the state money would still need to be paid in full within a year of the expected 2011 completion of corps efforts to raise levees to protect against so-called "100-year" storm, those with a predicted 1 percent chance of occurring in any year.

Even if the state found a way of raising that much money for New Orleans levees, Graves said, it would leave no money available for dozens of coastal restoration and hurricane levee projects elsewhere in the state.

"And the impact will not be just on water resource efforts, but every segment of the state government," he said.

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