

Truckee residents skeptical of dam safety concerns

By Tom Knudson, Sacramento Bee

TRUCKEE – Amid dark clouds and wind, rain pummels the Sierra Nevada crest outside this quaint resort community. Near the airport, water begins to gush from the base of a big federal dam, undermining its foundation.

Then the earth shudders and the dam gives way, sending a giant wall of water hurtling down Martis Creek and the Truckee River Canyon. Pine trees snap like matchsticks. Bridges are blown out.

Downstream, Reno turns into an inland sea.

That is the nightmare scenario the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers described at a meeting here last week to discuss the Martis Creek Dam, which the agency calls one of the riskiest in America.

“Frankly, it’s not safe to operate in a normal manner,” said Matt Allen, leader of the corps’ dam safety study team.

Townspeople, though, responded warily, saying they fear the government is inflating the risk to build support for a new dam that would destroy large portions of picturesque Martis Valley.

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