

Flat Creek flood fight likely to require taxes

By Ben Graham | Posted: Wednesday, November 11, 2015 4:30 am

A property tax will eventually be needed to fund the special district formed to protect property owners along Flat Creek, but the nascent board is facing more immediate concerns, according to its chairman.

The Flat Creek Watershed Improvement District plans to ask the Teton Conservation District next week for money to help study the creek this winter.

The request will likely be for in the range of \$40,000, although the details are still being worked out, said Bill Wotkyns, chairman of the Flat Creek district.

The money will allow the board to take a closer look at how exactly the creek behaves in the winter, when plummeting temperatures often cause it to freeze from the bottom up, a phenomenon known as frazil ice that sometimes results in flooding.

The idea is to create several observation points along the creek to measure things such as temperature, rates of water flow, and where and how the creek ices up, Wotkyns said.

Teton Conservation District officials initially back the idea.

“We certainly support the effort to conduct a more comprehensive study of Flat Creek,” outgoing Executive Director Randy Williams said.

Later this winter discussions are likely to begin about raising taxes on landowners within the 180-acre district.

“We’ve got to consider it, obviously,” Wotkyns said. “That’s part of why we formed the district.”

Those discussion will take place between January and March, when the board discusses its budget for the next fiscal year, he said.

The district was formed last year as a way to give property owners more control and responsibility over managing winter flooding. A board of directors was elected in December.

The board has secured \$24,000 for its operating budget from the town of Jackson and the Teton



Flat Creek flood prevention

Heavy machinery clears Flat Creek of ice in 2014 in an effort to stop the stream from overflowing its banks and flooding nearby homes.

Conservation District. Teton County declined to contribute.

The board also was able to convince the town and the Teton Conservation District to each hold \$15,000 in reserves for emergency flood relief.

The town has helped combat flooding in the past by hiring heavy equipment to go into the creek and break up ice dams, but questions have been raised about costs and liability.

Monitoring this winter should help the district board figure out the best ways to address flooding in the future.

As an example, district officials should be able to get a better grasp on the efficacy of thaw wells, which are used to pump warmer water into the creek to keep ice from forming.

Wotkyns has said sending backhoes into the creek is a last resort.

Another topic that has yet to be decided is the future of the dozens of weirs in the creek. The rock formations were added by the town, based on the recommendation of the Army Corps of Engineers, as a way to improve fish habitat and to mitigate flooding, but the Federal Emergency Management Agency would like to see the weirs taken out.

The town and Teton Conservation District have been at odds over whether the weirs should be removed. Officials from the town and the district will meet soon to discuss their next steps.