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Coeur d'Alene tree removal cost could hit \$1.6M

COEUR d'ALENE, Idaho (AP) — A Coeur d'Alene engineering firm is estimating that removing hundreds of trees along the city's dike road as ordered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers could cost around \$1.6 million.

That estimate, compiled by Ruen-Yeager and Associates, was presented to a committee created to explore options to save the trees.

It exceeds the roughly \$50,000 to \$100,000 the city had originally estimated it could spend after it learned of the federal order in March. The order was the result of the federal agency studying levee safety after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

"This was more than expected, but until you go to bid on it, you never know what it's going to be," said John Bruning, committee chairman. "It's a big undertaking."

The engineering firm also provided a feasibility study for a modification to the dike system that could preserve the trees, according to committee members.

By installing sheet pilings — a metal floodwall driven through the center of the dike system — a majority of the vegetation on the dike could be preserved.

This option could cost up to \$3 million and would require permit approvals that could take some time to assemble, the Kootenai Environmental Alliance reported on its website. The group is represented on the committee.

Bruning said the committee is trying to schedule a meeting in the next month or two with Federal Emergency Management Agency officials to determine whether the 100-year floodplain area can be certified by a third party for insurance purposes.

Without the Army Corps certification, future building in the area could become all but impossible there. The corps ordered around 500 trees to be removed along the levee near the Spokane River and North Idaho College to receive the certification.

The city of Coeur d'Alene has two years to comply, but is looking at other options.

The order is also being challenged in court by KEA.

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