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# Groups warned of Oroville Dam emergency spillway failure years ago

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Groups warned of Oroville Emergency Spil

OROVILLE, Calif. - In 2005, a group representing Friends of the River, the Sierra Club and the South Yuba Citizens League warned the Federal Emergency Regulatory Commission of the potential hazards if the Oroville Dam emergency spillway were to be used.

Friends of the River senior policy staff member, Ron Stork, said that the group recommended the emergency spillway be made out of concrete.

"What we told them precisely was that if the spillway was used, it would throw massive amounts of the hillside into the downstream channel," Stork said. "Jeopardizing the transmission lines and towers that go across the emergency spillway, among other things."

Their request was denied and more than a decade later, the emergency the Oroville Dam spillway crisis happened.

"When the main spillway broke, it demonstrated that the hillside was highly erodible," Stork said. "DWR's geologist had assured regulators that there was only 1-4 feet erodible ground on top of the hillside. As you can see from the photos and what we have seen this year, it was more like 100 or 200 feet of erodible hillside. It is clear that the hillside was much more erodible than predicted."



When the emergency spillway crisis happened in February, the erosion of the hillside threatened to collapse the structure. As a result, hundreds of thousands of people were evacuated.

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Stork said that they still recommend that DWR build a full concrete emergency spillway.

"If you have a proper spillway, then the water goes to the top of the spillway and slides down the concrete spillway," said Stork. "It does not throw large chunks of the hillside into the downstream channel. It does not throw all that mud into the channel that caused the evacuation of the fish hatchery. It does not trip the powerhouse offline. It does not endanger the transmission lines and transmission powers."

The Friends of the River published recommendations to improve the current spillway. However, Stork believes that their recommendations will not be heeded.

DWR said that they are looking into all long term constructional alternatives and have said that they have read some of the report the Friends of the River published.