

TESTIMONY OF CHRISTOPHER H. NEUDECK
BEFORE THE U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND POWER
REGARDING H.R. 6014

September 7, 2006

I am Christopher H. Neudeck, a California Registered Civil Engineer. I have worked for over twenty-four (24) years as an Engineer for various Reclamation Districts in the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta. My experience includes levee design, floodfighting, levee break repair, dewatering, levee rehabilitation and improvement and routine levee maintenance.

Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta

The Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta is the tidal area where the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers and their tributaries meet Suisun Bay as part of the San Francisco Bay Delta Estuary, the largest estuary on the West Coast of the United States. The Delta comprises more than 738,000 acres in five counties. The Delta's 700 miles of waterways surround more than 60 leveed tracts and islands where land elevations vary roughly from more than ten (10) feet above sea level to as much as twenty (20) feet below sea level. The lowest lands are in the agricultural portions of the western Delta where pockets of organic soil continue to subside primarily due to oxidation of peat. The Delta is an extremely fertile and productive agricultural area, its 700 miles of meandering, sheltered waterways provide for a recreational wonderland, its channels serve as the hub of the deliveries of water from north to south and store and provide for the capture of surplus natural flows, and it is the State's most important fishery habitat. The Water Education Foundation reports an estimated 25 percent of all warm water and anadromous sport fishing species and 80 percent of the state's commercial fishery species live in or migrate through the Delta. Contained within the Delta are the cities of Antioch, Brentwood, Isleton, Pittsburg and Tracy and numerous unincorporated towns and villages. Major cities partly within the Delta are Sacramento, Stockton, West Sacramento and Lathrop. Attached hereto is Table 7 from the 1993 Delta Atlas prepared by the California Department of Water Resources which provides Delta statistics.

Since 1990, urban development has greatly expanded. Recreational uses have also expanded but at a lesser rate. The conversion of Delta agricultural lands to other uses includes major areas set aside for wildlife habitat. In 1992, the State established the Delta Protection Commission which essentially precluded urban development within the Delta Primary Zone. This area which is primarily devoted to agriculture has the least ability to pay and contains some of the more challenging levee problems.

Recognition of Need for Delta Levee Action

Although the State and Federal interest and need for action to upgrade Delta levees has been clear for many years, significant State and Federal assistance has been basically limited to disaster assistance until 1984 when the State committed roughly Ten Million Dollars per year to the State Delta Levee Maintenance Subvention Program. One-half of the funds went to special projects of the California Department of Water Resources and the other one-half to a local cost-share program where after the local district expended \$1,000.00 per mile of levee the State would reimburse up to 75% of the cost. Due to limited availability of funding, the State failed to provide its full cost share and the typical reimbursement has been about 50% to 60%.

Although the federal interest in agriculture, commercial and recreational navigation, the Stockton and Sacramento Inland Ports, highways, railroads, electrical transmission lines, natural gas storage, utility pipelines, anadromous fish, migratory waterfowl, and fresh water supplies as related to the Delta is and has been clear, the non-disaster federal contribution to maintenance and rehabilitation of the non-project levees in the Delta has been directed primarily to studies. The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers Draft Feasibility Report and Draft Environmental Impact Statement - October 1982 reports that the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Investigation began in 1962. To date the studies have failed to produce any physical work.

There Is A Real Need To Secure Funds That Will Result in Immediate Placement of Dirt and Rock On Existing Levees To Reduce The Risk of Levee Failure. H.R. 6014 Is A Step In The Right Direction.

The most effective way to accomplish this result is to contribute funding to the already ongoing State Delta Levee Maintenance Subvention Program which is administered by the State Reclamation Board through the California Department of Water Resources and California Department of Fish and Game. The program allocates funding for reimbursement to local agencies based on categories. The categories include expenditures to achieve the Short Term Hazard Mitigation Plan Standards and expenditures to achieve the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers PL 84-99 Delta levee standards for agricultural levees or the comparable Bulletin 192-82 State Standards. The program already incorporates environmental mitigation and enhancement and is jointly managed by the California Department of Fish and Game. H.R. 6014 will provide funds to such program.

There are of course other delta levee related challenges that should be addressed; however, H.R. 6014 is certainly an important step in the right direction.

Attached hereto for the record is a copy of my previous testimony given on October 20, 2005, which addresses some of the related issues which can and should be the subject of other legislation.

Dated: September 7, 2006

CHRISTOPHER H. NEUDECK