

Statement of
Paul Jacks
Deputy Director, California Governor's Office of Emergency Services

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Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on Water and Power

Concerning "Protecting Sacramento / San Joaquin Bay-Delta Water Supplies and Responding to
Failures in California Water Deliveries"

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Introduction

Good morning Chairman Pombo, Subcommittee Chairman Radanovich, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on "Protecting Sacramento/San Joaquin Bay-Delta Water Supplies and Responding to Catastrophic Failures in California Water Deliveries." As you are well aware, California faces many threats. Since 1989, California has experienced 61 disasters resulting in a Governor's state of emergency, and, of these, 33 were significant enough to be declared federal emergencies or major disasters. The recent storms last December and January caused an estimated \$400 million in damages in a 29 county area and affected more than 50 reclamation districts in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. As Director Snow clearly articulated, California's aging levees pose a significant threat to the public safety, in addition to threatening California's critical water supply system that supports farms and communities across the state.

You have requested that I address the role of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) as it relates to the coordination and response to massive levee failures and resulting flooding, as well as water delivery interruptions and other consequences associated with levee disasters. Today, along with Director Snow, I will speak from the state perspective, as you will hear also from our federal partners, including the Bureau of Reclamation, United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and the Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), among others.

First, a few key principles about disasters in general:

- We cannot predict what the next disaster will bring. Each disaster has its own unique set of issues, so our emergency response system must be flexible-- the answer to ten different disaster scenarios is not ten individual plans.
- All disasters require common capabilities that must always be addressed by public safety agencies.
- Finally, to be truly prepared for any disaster we must focus on developing and strengthening organizational systems, training our personnel, communications, and resource acquisition. These areas are critical to all disasters, regardless of cause.

Systems

OES serves as the lead agency for emergency management in California. To ensure the most effective use of all resources for dealing with any emergency, OES makes every effort to include government at all levels, businesses, community-based organizations, and volunteers.

The fundamental mission of OES is to ensure that the state is ready and able to mitigate against, prepare for, respond to, and recover from the effects of emergencies that threaten lives, property, and the environment. To accomplish this mission, OES coordinates the activities of state agencies under the authority of the State Emergency Services Act and the California State Emergency Plan. OES also coordinates the response efforts of state and local agencies to ensure maximum effect with minimum overlap and confusion. Additionally, OES, in accordance with the National Response Plan (NRP), coordinates the integration of federal resources into state and local response and recovery operations, when needed.

OES accomplishes its mission through programs and outreach efforts that assist and support local and other state agency emergency management programs.

California has learned that the best way to ensure our disaster readiness is to develop sound and flexible systems that can be applied throughout the disaster spectrum. As stated previously, OES coordinates the state response to major emergencies in support of local government. The primary responsibility for emergency management, and in particular emergency response, rests with local government. In California, the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) serves as the mechanism by which local government requests and receives assistance.

Created by legislative mandate in response to the devastating Oakland-East Bay Hills Fire in 1991, SEMS is critical to California's emergency management organization. Since December 1, 1996, SEMS is required by law for managing responses to multi-agency and multi-jurisdiction emergencies in California. SEMS facilitates coordination among all responding agencies and expedites the flow of resources and communication within all organizational levels.

SEMS incorporates the Incident Command System (ICS), mutual aid, multi and inter-agency coordination, and operational area concepts. Mutual aid in California is executed through a "bottom-up" approach. Resource requests originate at the lowest level of government and are progressively forwarded to the next level until filled. For example, if an Operational Area (county) is unable to provide the necessary requested assistance to an affected jurisdiction, it may contact the OES Regional Emergency Operations Center (REOC) and forward the request. Requests for resources that cannot be filled at this level may then be forwarded to the State Operations Center (SOC). When necessary, the state also can coordinate federal resources on behalf of affected local governments, or even seek assistance from other states through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), which is administered by the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA). All government levels in California understand this system, and we all plan, train, and exercise within it to prevent delays and provide immediate access to assistance.

Deployed for the first time during the January 1997 floods, an incident that affected more than 30 counties and caused an estimated \$2 billion in damages and disaster-related losses, SEMS showed its strength and some weaknesses. Since that time, the system has been steadily improved and fully utilized by state and local agencies for emergency response activities. Its success has been unquestioned and the system has worked so well that certain of its features have been incorporated in the new National Incident Management System (NIMS).

As a result of having a standardized system, our planning at the state level has focused on assisting local governments to be well prepared for the hazards in their jurisdiction. Particular attention has been concentrated on cities and counties, as they primarily attend to human needs during and immediately after disasters. We have found that a common, all-hazards planning approach is the most effective means to address the many types of disasters for which we are at risk. In most cases, the consequences of disasters will be similar; for example, an evacuation and sheltering plan addressing special needs populations will apply whether there is flood, earthquake, or a massive levee failure.

As stated previously, SEMS provides the basic framework for response operations in the state of California. The California State Emergency Plan, however, provides the policies, concepts, and general protocols for the implementation of SEMS. Additionally, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) has an administrative order that outlines its emergency response functions as established in the California State Emergency Plan and which further guides OES and DWR in coordinating priority tasks and programs that the two departments will perform with respect to emergency preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation.

Current Levee Efforts

Since the Governor's proclamation of a state of emergency on February 24, 2006, and his subsequent request to the President for an emergency declaration, the state has been working on a levee failure contingency plan in coordination with other state, local, and federal government agencies. All six counties (Colusa, Sacramento, Solano, Sutter, Yolo, and Yuba) potentially affected by a failure at one of the 24 critical sites have been asked by OES and FEMA to review their emergency operations plans in relation to the current levee proclamation and to provide information as to their specific preparations for mass evacuation, shelter, and notification/warning. As part of the process, each county has identified special needs/vulnerable populations in the potential inundation zones and identified resource shortfalls. The City of Sacramento and Sacramento County, which have the most population at risk from a failure of one or more of these critical levee sites, have established robust flood awareness public education campaigns, including holding community meetings to discuss flooding threats, evacuation, and household preparedness.

We are also reviewing existing state and region-level plans and procedures, and identifying immediate actions that could be taken to improve these plans and procedures, in anticipation of a response to requests for local assistance resulting from an imminent or actual failure. The draft plans and procedures currently being updated or revised include Guidance for Sheltering During Large Scale Evacuations, Guidance for Evacuee Reception and Processing Center Operations, Mass Evacuation Guide Checklist, and the OES Inland Region Mass Evacuation System Operations Manual. OES is also finalizing the Inland Region Mass Evacuation System Operations Manual, which specifically addresses the handling

of evacuations that cross Operational Area boundaries. Documents developed as part of the Flood Emergency Action Team (FEAT) project, subsequent to the 1997 floods, are also being revisited.

Additionally, OES recently coordinated the formation of a Levee Failure Contingency Planning Group to identify response resources that the State may request from the Federal government to assist with a mass evacuation or sheltering effort. This planning group consists of a number of State agencies, including Department of Social Services, California Highway Patrol, Department of Transportation, Department of Health Services, Emergency Medical Services Authority, Department of Rehabilitation, Department of Food and Agriculture, DWR, California National Guard, and the American Red Cross. As we modify state plans and procedures we will meet with the counties to discuss potential joint operations and identify potential mutual aid requests. FEMA will also participate in those discussions with local governments.

To support the contingency planning effort, OES, through the Levee Failure Contingency Planning Group, is identifying resources that may be requested from the Federal government to support mass evacuation or sheltering operations should a levee failure occur. Currently, these resource needs are primarily related to planning and evacuation/sheltering support. To support planning efforts, the state could benefit from federal assistance in modeling failure at critical levee failure locations throughout the Central Valley and Delta. Examples of operational support include air operations management support (including staffing the tower at the former McClellan Air force Base), aircraft capable of moving swift water rescue teams and equipment from southern to northern California, helicopters and flat-bottomed boats to augment similar State and local assets in performing rescue missions, and mobilization center support. We will continue to refine our lists as our planning efforts expand. If conditions develop that could put further pressure on the weak levee sites, such as warm spring rains leading to rapid melt of the Sierra snow pack, the State and local agencies may request federal assistance with aerial reconnaissance of the levee system and with flood-fight operations.

OES is also working with FEMA to develop a concept of operations for catastrophic flood response that will serve in the interim until more formalized catastrophic planning initiatives are finalized.

Summary

There is no doubt that the devastating effects of hurricanes Katrina and Rita have been a wake up call to all, and Governor Schwarzenegger's aggressive response to the critical threat facing California's levees has focused much needed attention to this real and ever-present hazard. Although California has a strong emergency management system, we know that large-scale disasters, such as those associated with a catastrophic levee failure or earthquake in California, will affect hundreds of thousands of people, and gravely stress our ability to preserve life and safety and recover our economy. Our State and nation are rich in resources to assist during a disaster—from local government up to federal military assets. We will fail our citizens, however, if there is not a system, organization, and infrastructure in place to get this support to where it is needed in an expedient and organized manner.

The strength and experience within California's system is unequivocal. Repeatedly, our state has had emergencies that span the entire spectrum of the challenges faced in Hurricane Katrina—severe economic impact, major transportation disruptions, infrastructure destruction, mass evacuations, loss of life and many others. From each of these emergencies system improvements were born. Unfortunately, we have had many opportunities to learn and improve and we have not been idle. We will continue to learn from our successes and opportunities for improvement to create an even stronger emergency management system

Thank you.

