

Statement of Kirk Rodgers
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Before the U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Water and Power

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

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Introduction

Mr. Chairman, and members of the Subcommittee, I am Kirk Rodgers, Mid-Pacific Regional Director for the Bureau of Reclamation. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the current water related infrastructure conditions in California's Central Valley and the challenges we face in protecting future water supply deliveries. My remarks are focused on the work and activities in the Sacramento/San Joaquin River Delta (Delta) and on the risk faced in the context of levee failures.

Importance of the Delta

The Delta includes nearly 60 islands and tracts lying below sea level that are protected by levees. These mostly privately owned and maintained levees were built to protect crops from flooding. We will defer to the Corps of Engineers and the State of California to more fully address the condition of the levees in the Sacramento/San Joaquin River system.

The importance of the Delta to California's complicated water supply delivery system cannot be overstated. Water pumped out of the Delta provides drinking water for two-thirds of the state's population, and supports one of the most productive agricultural regions in the nation. The Delta's channels convey water from upstream reservoirs to the south Delta, where the Central Valley Project (CVP) and State Water Project (SWP) facilities can move water into the CVP's Delta-Mendota Canal and the SWP's California Aqueduct. The stability of the Delta levees that contain the water in these channels is paramount to protecting the Delta infrastructure ensuring a reliable supply of fresh water to the Federal and State facilities.

The failure of key levees has the potential to impact the CVP water supply that is managed by Reclamation. My testimony today will focus on Reclamation's response to levee failures as opposed to dam safety or canal failures. Additionally, I will describe a generalized response to scenarios ranging from a small levee failure, such as Jones Tract levee failure, to a disaster that could have a prolonged and indefinite impact on significant portions of the CVP water supply.

Response to Levee Failure

In June 2004, a levee failure occurred in dry weather and without warning on Upper Jones Tract in the South Delta. Following the break, Delta pumping was curtailed for several days to prevent seawater intrusion into the Delta. The State and Federal pumping plants were limited for a time and water shipments to Southern California were continued only through unscheduled releases from San Luis Reservoir, a large off-stream reservoir where water is held after it is pumped from the Delta. Releases were also increased at Folsom, Shasta, and Oroville reservoirs, sending more fresh water to the Delta for salinity control. The costs related to this levee break were estimated to be nearly \$100 million according the California Department of Water Resources report entitled *Flood Warnings: Responding to California's Flood Crisis*, January 2005. The levee is privately owned. The cause of the break is still unknown.

Reclamation's response to any levee failure would be based on the nature and extent of the failure. The response would depend on a number of factors, including:

- risk of flood or earthquake,
- the number of failed levees,
- the time of the year (winter or summer), and
- the location of the levee failures.

Reclamation's CVP water service contracts have a shortage provision which recognizes that short-term or long-term water shortages may occur as a result of unforeseen events, such as a significant levee failure. This contract provision

would allow Reclamation to respond to health and safety concerns that might arise as a result of such an event.

In general, Reclamation would respond to a levee failure in the following way:

- Work with the Division of California Water Resources to stabilize the situation in accordance with the State's Disaster Preparedness Plan.
- If necessary, modify upstream reservoir releases and re-operation of associated canals to manage potential salt water intrusion.
- Employ the use of temporary features, such as barriers, pumps, or canals to ensure an adequate supply of quality water is accessible.

During any emergency situation, Reclamation closely coordinates with the California Department of Water Resources, the California Office of Emergency Services, the Corps of Engineers, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Levee breaks in particular also involve coordination with the State Water Resources Control Board and various other local agencies.

Conclusion

Reclamation is committed and prepared to use all tools at our discretion to manage an emergency of any size regarding levee failure in the Delta. In a worst case scenario where the only available usable water supply is contained in reservoirs upstream of the Delta, the State of California has the authority under the state water code to determine the best usage of the available water supply in the interest of public health and safety. Reclamation will continue to cooperate with other agencies and the public to protect the CVP water supply in the event of a levee failure in the Delta.

That concludes my testimony. Mr. Chairman, I would like to reiterate my appreciation to the sub-committee and others for continuing to work with the Administration to address these significant water issues facing California. I would be happy to answer any questions at the appropriate time.