

COMPLETE STATEMENT OF
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Subcommittee on Water and Power
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Introduction

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, I am Brigadier General Joseph Schroedel, Commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers South Pacific Division. I am honored to be testifying before your committee oversight hearing today on "Protecting Sacramento/ San Joaquin Bay-Delta Water Supplies and Responding to Catastrophic Failures in California Water Deliveries." This is an important topic. If you take away one message from my testimony, I hope it will be this: Both short-term actions and long-term solutions are essential to confront this issue. We need to take action now to address critical needs and reduce the threat of catastrophic failure or we risk allowing a failure to determine our actions. At the same time, we need to work with our federal, state and local partners to develop the system-wide, long-term strategy.

Background

Since I last testified before you in October 2005 regarding the Corps' efforts to reduce the risk of flood damage to the Sacramento/San Joaquin River system, the Corps has undertaken a full-court press to prepare the "CALFED Levee Stability Program Report to Congress." The Corps is required to submit the report on May 18, 2006 in accordance with the Congressionally mandated 180-day requirement. I am happy to report to the Committee that we are on schedule to deliver the report on time.

Before I discuss the details of the report, let me characterize the Corps' assessment of the situation in the Delta.

As the hub of California's two largest water distribution systems, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta supplies drinking water to more than 22 million people and irrigation water to millions of acres of highly productive agricultural land. It is a haven for 750 plant and animal species and home to hundreds of thousands of people.

Yet this valuable resource is inadequately protected by an extremely fragile levee system that threatens to fail at any time, even under fair weather conditions. Unlike other levee systems that protect against high water events, the Delta's maze of mostly non-federal levees must work all day, every day to keep water from inundating people living below sea level. In fact, these islands are often referred to as "bowls." The levees that make up the rims of these bowls are part of the State-wide water conveyance system, yet have suffered as local reclamation districts have not been able to properly maintain them due to a lack of local resources.

During the last century, there have been 162 levee failures in the Delta that led to major inundation of islands, regardless of the weather conditions. These have been costly, as illustrated by the recent Jones Tract levee failure in June 2004 which occurred without warning during fair weather, inundating 12,000 acres of property and causing an estimated \$100 million in damages.

Congress recognized the threat and cost of these serious levee failures and directed the Corps to deliver a report that prioritizes potential levee stability projects in the Delta. The CALFED Bay-Delta Authorization Act (Public Law 108-361) authorized using up to \$90 million dollars in Corps funds through 2010 to implement these projects. The Corps invited Delta stakeholders to submit proposals addressing critical levee improvement needs.

In response, Delta area reclamation districts and flood management agencies submitted more than 54 project proposals totaling more than \$1 billion in estimated costs.

We evaluated the proposals based on the extent to which they would reduce the risk to life, health and safety, urban

and agricultural properties, and strategic infrastructure for transportation, utilities and water supply. The report currently being prepared has identified a preliminary list of potential projects, consistent with Section 205 authority, that could be considered in future Administration budget requests to further CALFED goals. It is important to note that any selected projects would require site-specific design and environmental compliance work before construction.

While the Corps' Delta Report to Congress provides a prioritized list of projects that can be accomplished in the near-term with the help of federal funding, state, local and federal stakeholders in the State of California will need a long-term vision for the Delta before we can truly tackle the monumental task of providing comprehensive and systematic flood management to this region.

The Corps' long-term strategy will be developed in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Islands and Levees Feasibility Study. This comprehensive study will address all CALFED objectives and assess existing and future flood risks in the Delta as well as water supply needs, ecosystem restoration and recreation. Scheduled to begin this year, the study will provide a comprehensive vision and roadmap for future federal participation in the Delta. The study will incorporate the California Department of Water Resources' Delta Risk Management Strategy (DRMS), which will quantify risks and potential impacts and develop a risk reduction strategy. The feasibility study will build upon the DRMS to address remaining levee stability work beyond the \$90 million federal effort authorized in the CALFED Act.

This report is the first step in a multi-year effort to address levee stability concerns in the Delta region; however, both short-term actions and a long-term strategy are essential.

Emergency Preparedness

Mr. Chairman, the Committee also raises the question of whether local, state and federal authorities are prepared to respond to a Catastrophic Failures in California Water Deliveries. The Corps and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are working with the state to remedy the fact that right now most northern California communities do not have an updated assessment of their flood risk. Flood plain maps are often out of date by 10, 15, and even 20-years. They rely on old geotechnical data, and understanding of flood risk, under seepage, and levee performance, which has changed in recent years. In 2004, the Corps developed new procedures for how we need to assess levees for the deep under seepage in the Central Valley. That knowledge will help us evaluate levees with these updated technologies. We will work with FEMA and the State to help ensure that local communities have updated, accurate assessments of their flood risk.

The Corps also needs to update its emergency response plans and practices to optimize effectiveness and efficiencies given what we now know about California levees and the potential for multiple failures during a major earthquake event. While the State and local agencies are responsible for the first line of defense and responsiveness in emergency actions, the Corps is ready to assist in flood fighting, provision of emergency water supply and other activities in cooperation with non-federal entities when called upon. We need to update and clarify roles and responsibilities, and enhance communications and public education.

The innovative Silver Jackets program, which relies on funding from our Floodplain Management Services (FPMS) and Planning Assistance to the States (PAS) programs, combines the knowledge and programs of FEMA and the Corps, and this year has started building that relationship in California. This program is the meshing together of Federal, state, and local hazard planning and mitigation activities along with improved processes for emergency response and recovery.

This concludes my statement. Again, I appreciate this opportunity to testify today. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.