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Testimony
Before the Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Water and Power
United States House of Representatives

Oversight hearing on
"Protecting Sacramento/San Joaquin Bay-Delta Water Supplies and
Responding to Catastrophic Failures in California Water Deliveries"

April 6, 2006

Background

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta lies at the confluence of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers in the heart of the Central Valley of California. The overall system consisting of some upstream levees and levees in the heart of the Delta contains over 1,600 miles of federal participation levees, and an additional 730 miles of levees which are non-federal. This system of channels, weirs and bypasses protect more than a half million people and in excess of \$50 billion of property improvements. The Delta itself stretches across six counties and contains mostly agricultural land uses; however, the cities of Brentwood, Tracy, Lathrop, Manteca, Stockton, Lodi and Sacramento all lie within the influence of the Delta. Today we are speaking to you as San Joaquin County on behalf of the Delta. Approximately a third of the Delta lies within our county, but the Delta itself is not only important to us and the surrounding counties, but also the entire state and country. Construction of the levees started back in the 1860s in order to protect agricultural operations. Since that time many of the islands created by these levees have subsided due to several physical phenomenon. It is not uncommon in some areas to find the elevation of the islands to be as much as 20 feet below sea level. The California San Joaquin Central Valley levee system that protects invaluable infrastructure has received limited maintenance funding for decades.

Activities Within the Delta

On first review it would appear that the Delta is primarily an agricultural concern. Closer examination shows that there are various elements of both transportation and utilities infrastructure that are supported by the Delta and would be severely impacted by a levee failure. As shown on the attached map there are numerous state and interstate highways that traverse the Delta, as well as several transcontinental railroads and two deep water ports, significant statewide power transmission and natural gas storage and transmission facilities, to say nothing of the water transmission facilities which provide a significant portion of the San Francisco Bay Area, as well as, the California Aqueduct and Delta Mendota Canal which serve the southern central valley and the majority of southern California.

Impacts of Delta Levee Failure

Most of the levees in the Delta are quite fragile. They are constructed on weak and unstable soils and the levees themselves have often been constructed with excavated non-engineered soil. These levees are all subject to various forms of potential failure including over-topping, earthquakes, base failures, seepage, wind and water erosion, extended high water saturation, dam failure inundation, to say nothing of rodent damage. In June of 2004, a levee break occurred on Lower Jones Island which appears to have been due to burrowing rodents. This failure resulted in the flooding of approximately 12,000 acres, displacement of agricultural workers, took nearly a year to restore the island, and cost to the State and Federal governments for restoration exceeded \$100 million. In 1997 floods resulting from high flows in the San Joaquin River forced more than 120,000 people from their homes, and damaged or destroyed 30,000 homes and 2,000 businesses. This is just a small example of what could occur. The State of California Department of Water Resources has conducted a risk analysis to determine what could happen in the event of an approximate magnitude 6.5 earthquake on the west side of the Delta. That forecast predicts 30 levee failures inundating 16 islands, causing major disruption to transportation and utility systems, and, most important the disruption of water supply to over 22 million citizens, industry and agriculture for several years. The economic, to say nothing of the personal impact of such a failure, would be a catastrophe of a similar magnitude that has been suffered by the city of New Orleans. The State's analysis also indicated that the probability of an earthquake of 6.5 at this location is quite similar to that of a Katrina event. It estimates economic damages exceeding \$30 billion over five years.

Management of the Delta

The management of the Delta is a very complicated issue with numerous state and federal regulatory agencies being involved as well as numerous counties, cities and utilities having very strong interests. It is important to note that at in San Joaquin County, most of these islands were created and are being maintained by individual separate small Reclamation Districts that are managed by the farmers on those respective islands. Within San Joaquin County alone there are 51 such Reclamation Districts. Involved federal agencies in the Delta include the Federal Bureau of Reclamation, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Bureau of Land Management, EPA, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Department of Agriculture, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, NOAA Fisheries, as well as the federal

participation in the CalFed Bay-Delta Program. Although the County of San Joaquin maintains no levees directly within the Delta, we do maintain levees upstream of the Delta that are instrumental to the entire system. We also participate during emergency evacuation and relief activities. The County is not resourced to fight major floods and looks to the State and Federal government for assistance in such cases. It should be noted that the County in cooperation with the City of Stockton and the San Joaquin Flood Control District developed a project to upgrade levees in the Stockton area. This was done proactively to meet FEMA requirements with subsequent federal approval for reimbursement. This project serves as a model of rapid project development which should be further considered in order to expedite improvements at a reduced cost. It should also be noted that the County is also advocating the More Water Project for off-stream flood storage from the Mokelumne River which also feeds into the Delta. If the County is successful in this project, storm water diversion during peak periods of high flow would decrease the potential problems in the Delta.

Problem Identification

In Summary, the Delta is a facility of importance to not just San Joaquin County but the entire state of California and Nation. The infrastructure upon which we depend is very old. We have seen declining participation on behalf of state and federal agencies in helping to maintain and improve these facilities. There is increased development in these areas. There are ongoing disputes as far as responsibility for failures. And finally, there is not a clear direction for the future of the Delta. At this time in San Joaquin County we feel the need to evaluate the Delta and determine how to assure its sustainability. We need a comprehensive plan. We need funding and somehow or another, we need stronger, focused leadership.

Local Actions

In order to address these matters the San Joaquin County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, which is only a planning agency with limited resources, has begun to take steps to work with the entities within our County and surrounding areas to develop some strategies and plans to address these issues. The Federal Government could be of assistance in helping us to address the following issues:

Short Term:

- Streamline environmental processes for permitting of levee maintenance work
- Consider restoration of historic U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) dredging activities
- Complete the *California Sacramento & San Joaquin River Basin Comprehensive Study* started by the USACE and the California State Reclamation Board in response to concerns raised by the 1997 flood. A draft interim report, which fell far short of the original project scope, was released in July 2002
- Authorize participation of the USACE in emergency response and emergency evacuation planning

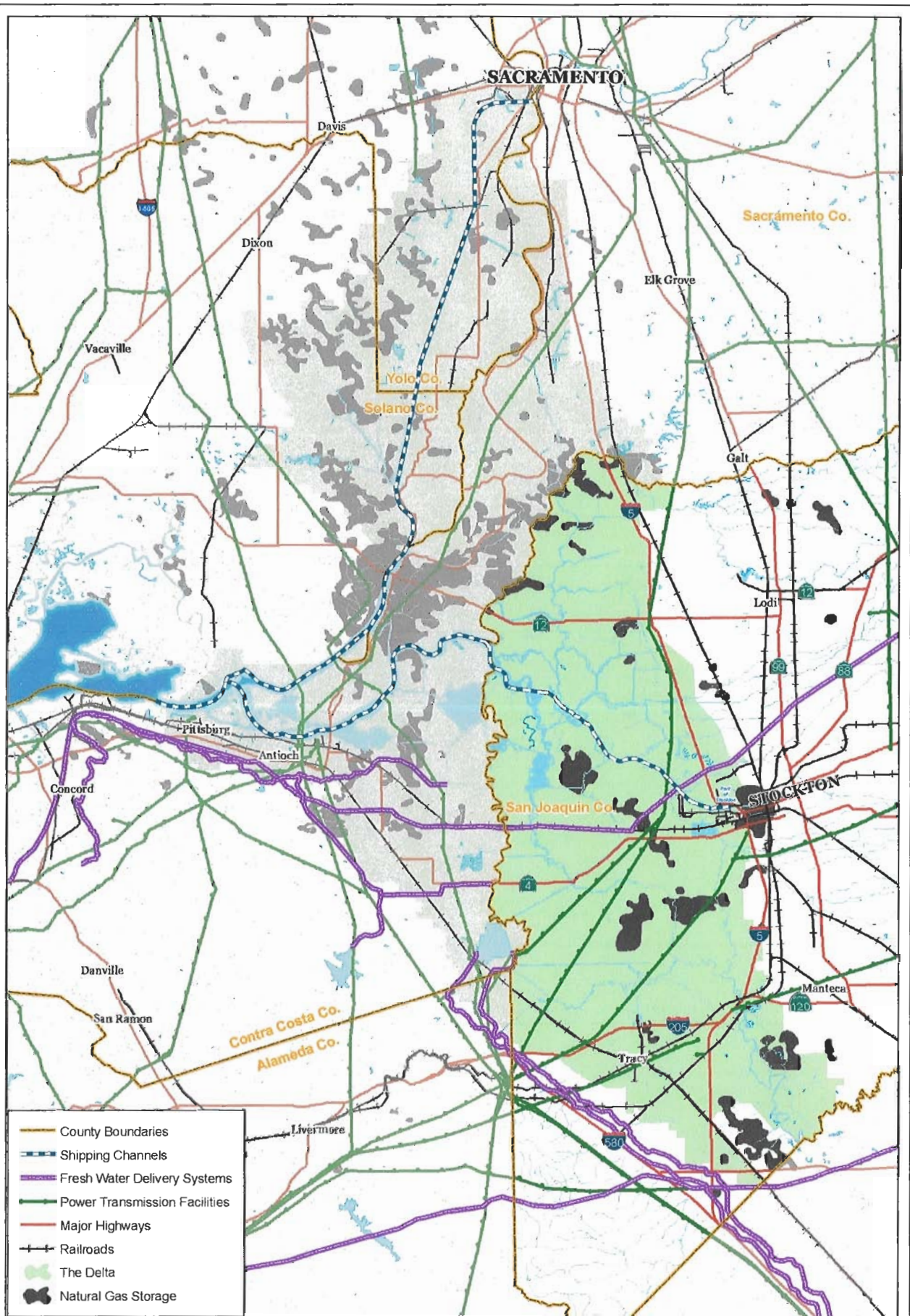
Mid Term:

- Provide leadership and/or funding to become a part of the team to design the future of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta
- Direct the USACE to assume a leadership role in assuring preservation of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta
- Fund USACE research into development of new, cost-effective strategies for design, construction and maintenance of levees

Long Term:

- Increase federal participation for maintenance of Delta levees
- Support local implementation of projects with Federal review and cost-share reimbursement

Thank you very much for your consideration in this matter.



SACRAMENTO - SAN JOAQUIN DELTA

INFRASTRUCTURE OF STATEWIDE SIGNIFICANCE

