

Meeting Notes
NORTH DELTA IMPROVEMENTS GROUP MEETING
Wednesday, December 1, 2004
9:30-11:30 at Jones & Stokes (2600 V Street)

ATTENDANCE LIST:

Aramburu, Margit	Delta Protection Commission (DPC)
Brown, David	Sacramento-Yolo Mosquito and Vector Control District (SYMVCD)
Burkholder, Brad	California Department of Fish and Game (DFG)
Crouch, Craig	Sacramento County Department of Water Resources
Darsie, Bill	KSN Engineers
Dutton, Bill	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR)
Fleenor, Bill	University of California, Davis (UCD)
Gwaltney, Dan	Sacramento County
Hadl, Stefan	KCRA-TV
Hall, Brad	Northwest Hydraulic Consultants (NHC)
Hoppe, Walt	Point Pleasant
Knittweis, Gwen	California Department of Water Resources North Delta (DWR)
Kwan, Johnathan	Department of Health Services
Labrie, Gil	DCC Engineering
Martin, Monica	DWR
Martin, Sara	Jones & Stokes (J&S)
Moughamian, Raffi	UCD
Orcutt, Bob	DFG
Schmutte, Curt	DWR
Seville, Steve	Jones & Stokes
Simons, Rachel	East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD)
Trieu, Don	MBK Engineers
Van Loben Sels, Topper	DPC/North Delta Water Agency (NDWA)
Whitener, Keith	The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
Wilson, Daniel	DPC
Zemitis, Collette	DWR

HANDOUTS

- Meeting Agenda
- Meeting Notes from September 22, 2004 meeting
- “North Delta Flood Control and Ecosystem Restoration Project Staten Island Setback Levee Conceptual Model”

1. INTRODUCTIONS – Gwen Knittweis and Curt Schmutte, DWR

Gwen Knittweis welcomed everyone to the meeting and facilitated a round of introductions. Curt Schmutte said that he wanted to update the group on reorganization of certain DWR programs. DWR would like to have a more unified voice with the US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), and so is planning on moving the Levee Program to the Division of Flood Management. The North Delta project will also move under the umbrella of the Division of Flood Management. This means that the new chain of command is as follows: Lester Snow (Director), Steve Verigin (Deputy Director), Les Harder (Flood Mangement Division Chief), Curt Schmutte.

Margit Aramburu asked if the reorganization meant that the North Delta project would be subject to new review. Mr. Schmutte noted that the project goals would not change—that the project would

remain a balance of flood control and ecosystem restoration alternatives. He feels it is a positive change for the North Delta project, as allows the project to take advantage of the lines of communication that already exist between DWR Flood Management and the Corps. He also mentioned that DWR North Delta staff recently briefed DWR upper management (Lester Snow and Steve Veregan) about the project. Several funding possibilities were discussed, including bond monies, ecosystem restoration funds, flood control funds, and general fund monies. A meeting attendee inquired if a "beneficiary pays" strategy was discussed for the funding of the North Delta project. Mr. Schmutte responded that for this project, the local reclamation districts probably could not provide substantial funding. The project team plans on looking to the Corps to supply some funding for the North Delta project. For example, since the Project could likely achieve the same or better benefits to the area than more costly levee-raising projects, perhaps in-lieu funds can be made available.

Mr. Schmutte indicated that there are currently only enough funds left in the DWR North Delta budget to finish the environmental analysis, including responses to comments and publication of a final EIR. He feels that the environmental document needs to be released in a timely manner in order to take advantage of the current momentum surrounding the project.

Mr. Schmutte then informed the group that the project is about two months away from an administrative draft environmental impact report (ADEIR), and that DWR plans to release sections of the ADEIR to various interest groups for review. Curt opened up the floor to any comments. Various meeting attendees voiced their opinion that they would refrain from commenting until the hydraulic modeling and environmental analysis are complete.

Daniel Wilson asked if DWR still planned to approach the environmental analysis with no preferred alternative. Curt confirmed that there would be no preferred alternative in the draft environmental impact report (EIR), but that there would be a preferred alternative identified in the Final EIR.

Craig Crouch, from the Sacramento County Department of Water Resources, indicated that Sacramento County is concerned about the direction DWR has taken with EIR, and that the Draft EIR may face a legal challenge from Sacramento County if their concerns are not taken into consideration. The County would like to see a broader range of alternatives addressed, including alternatives that would affect the FEMA floodplain, and would like to see the Point Pleasant area flood concerns receive an equal amount of consideration as other area stakeholders. Overall, Sacramento County is requesting that DWR reincorporate into the EIR one of the previously eliminated project alternatives that would provide a large flood control benefit to the Point Pleasant area as well as easement purchasing, and let the policy makers decide on the controversial FEMA floodplain issue. The County would hesitate to take a set of alternatives to the Board of Supervisors that does not come close to meeting County goals for flood control in the area, as the Board may recommend challenging the EIR.

Mr. Schmutte emphasized that the project is not an ultimate solution to all of the stakeholders, but provides near-term incremental benefits to most area stakeholders including Sacramento County.

Topper Van Loben Sels and Daniel Wilson, speaking as residents of Sacramento County and the north delta area, indicated that they understand this project is not the ultimate answer to their flooding problems, but it represents a step in the right direction. They would prefer to focus on a set of most likely alternatives and get a project built as soon as possible, rather than wait for the perfect project.

Mr. Crouch indicated that it is a critical time to start acquiring easements in the Point Pleasant area—if easements are not acquired, developers will begin to purchase the land right down to the delta, even if it is in the floodplain, and strengthen the levees themselves.

DWR and Sacramento County agreed to meet, along with SAFCA, and discuss these issues.

2. HYDRAULIC MODELING UPDATE – Bill Fleenor, UC Davis

Bill Fleenor, who has been conducting the MIKE-11 hydraulic modeling for the North Delta project, presented an update on the modeling process. One hydrology the model is calibrated to simulate is the 1997 storm event, which has been shown statistically to be a 100 year event or higher at the Cosumnes River at Michigan Bar gage by the Army Corps of Engineers and David Ford Consultants. Discussion of the 1997 event being depicted as a 100 year storm event occurred. Mr. Fleenor explained that determining a “100 year flood event” for the north delta area depends on the location within the project area that a storm event is being analyzed. For example, a 100 year event at Michigan Bar is going to statistically less of an event at New Hope Landing.

Mr. Fleenor gave a briefing on the work of the researchers who developed the MIKE-11 model. He then demonstrated the efficacy of the model over varying flood years, showing how the model results match up with actual hydrology from the 2000, 1999, 1998, 1986 and 1997 storm events (which range from ~2.5 year to ~100 year event at the Cosumnes River at Michigan Bar gage).

Next he presented the ecosystem restoration modeling results for the three ecosystem restoration options being taking forward to impact analysis in the form of animations.. Each option flooded McCormack-Williamson Tract roughly every 2.5 years. As far as flood control benefits are concerned, the McCormack-Williamson Tract options offer the same benefit relative to each other. The model also showed the tidally-influenced daily flow through the island in Option 1, in which a side channel is encouraged to form through the middle of the island. Mr. Fleenor also made the point that the tidally-influenced flow levels through McCormack-Williamson change from year to year, as there is a great inter-annual tidal variation in the North Delta (as shown by plots of summer stages at Benson’s Ferry and New Hope Landing data from 1983-2004).

Questions were raised among the meeting attendees about whether factors that may affect flow in the north delta area were taken into account in this model. Specifically, attendees asked about increased delta exports and the delta cross-channel (DCC). Mr. Schmutte indicated that the San Joaquin River is so massive, increased exports downstream of the delta could not possibly change stages north of the delta. Regarding the DCC, Mr. Fleenor explained that when the DCC gates are opened up, the only real effect it has on hydrology in the area is to mute the low end of the tidal flux. (The DCC gates are closed during flood events).

UCD and DWR stated that flood control modeling results would be presented at the next NDIG meeting (January 12, 2004) . Although it is not complete as of yet, Mr. Fleenor offered up some initial observations on the flood control options:

- Degrading Dead Horse Island levees produces minimum benefit
- Weir location placement on Staten Island affects stage reduction, and weir placement at the northern end of Staten Island has the most stage reduction benefit, as flow is directed towards the weir.

- Dredging raises stages at lower Staten Island from a half to three-quarters of a foot.

Mr. Fleenor said he would accept comments via his e-mail address at wefleenor@ucdavis.edu. He also offered to burn a cd containing the model for anyone who was interested.

The group then agreed that they would like to see a presentation of model results at the next NDIG meeting, which will be held on Wednesday, January 12, 2005 at 9:30 a.m.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTATION PROGRESS REPORT – Sara Martin, Jones & Stokes

Sara Martin updated the group on the status of the environmental analysis. The project description is being developed jointly by DWR and Jones and Stokes. DWR has reviewed and confirmed the actions that are proposed as part of the project alternatives, and Jones & Stokes is now completing the description of the actions with detailed engineering information and assumptions. Data has been collected for all of the biological environment chapters, and analyses are under way. The physical environment chapters are largely pending the hydraulic modeling results. It is anticipated that it will require about two months of preparation time upon completion of the modeling.

A question was raised about how the document will handle vector control. Ms. Martin explained that mosquito issues and vector control would be addressed in the public health chapter, which will likely recommend a staged mitigation, with monitoring and adaptive management.

Bill Dutton inquired into the level of concept design for the proposed levee work in each alternative. Ms. Knittweis explained that the concepts would be designed to a level that will be useful to determine required cost for construction. NHC will be the lead in designing levee degradation protection, channel breach protection, weirs, and tide gate sizing.

In addition, Kevin Tillis' conceptual design for the internal levee on Staten Island can be found on the project website. Because DWR's Division of Safety of Dams (DSOD) will ultimately need to permit the interior Staten Island levee as a dam, Margit Aramburu suggested including someone from that division in the North Delta Advisory Team meetings.

Ms. Knittweis indicated that the environmental document would include analysis of seepage effects to adjacent islands.

4. ALTERNATIVES REFINEMENT UPDATE – Collette Zemitis, DWR

Collette Zemitis informed the group that the recent CALFED science conference had gone very well. In addition to presenting some of the McCormack-Williamson Tract restoration options, she attended some very interesting presentations and discussions. One of these presentations was given by Gary Ivey on greater sandhill cranes, and Ms. Zemitis later had a chance to discuss the North Delta project with him. He felt that flood control option 1 (at the northern end of Staten Island) would have the least effect on crane populations due to the fact that cranes are already disturbed due to road traffic.

She mentioned that global warming was an issue of concern at the conference, and that DWR plans to include global warming analysis in the EIR.

Ms. Zemitis then handed out the Staten Island Setback Levee Conceptual Model paper, which

includes a cross-section of the proposed setback levee design. Ms. Aramburu asked if the setback levees would be built to PL84-99 standards, a goal specified in the CALFED record of decision . Mr. Schmutte responded that the project team has not decided on the setback levee construction standards yet. It was expressed by some in the group that in the present design, the project team should expect many to balk at the steep slope, narrow crown width, and narrow bench width. Gwen Knittweis indicated that the cross section designs were based on the conceptual design work prepared by Kevin Tillis Engineers that was presented at a previous NDIG and was available on the project website.

Monica Martin covered the final agenda item on Project Phasing. Before discussing the implications of model results to project phasing, she responded to a few of Sacramento County's concerns earlier in the meeting. She explained that the concept of Staten Island being used as a bypass had to be taken out of consideration because model results and technical analysis reveal the island does not have the physical ability to function as a bypass. There are also organic carbon issues complicating the matter. Descriptions of all alternatives that were considered but ultimately not analyzed in the environmental document were included in the previously-distributed "Alternatives Evaluation Process" document and will be included as an appendix to the EIR. She then explained that the project team had originally wanted to approach the project in a phased manner, but the modeling is not showing a benefit from using this approach, as it actually raised stages in some areas.

Mr. Crouch said that Sacramento County would like to see the Staten Island flow-through alternative analyzed because they want to ensure that the flood control system can handle any future flood events that may be larger than ever seen before. Mr. Schmutte indicated that the project does not intend to use Staten Island as the "relief valve" of the delta because it would violate the Staten Island escrow agreements.

Keith Whitener indicated that TNC wouldn't object to studies of the use of Staten Island as a "relief valve"—their concern is that if it is going to be considered for such use , that it be analyzed as such in the EIR and adequately mitigated. He feels that the 200-year flood event needs to be modeled in order to get a clearer picture.

6. NEXT MEETING

The next NDIG meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 12, 2005 at 9:30 a.m.