

February 13, 2003

FLD/ID3

Earl Nelson, Program Manager
Flood Protection Corridor Program
California Department of Water Resources
Division of Flood Management
1416 9th Street, Room 1641
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Flood Protection Corridor Program Grant Application

Dear Mr. Nelson,

The Kern County Water Agency is pleased to submit its application for funding of the Kern County Water Agency Improvement District No. 3 Flood Protection Corridor Program (the Program) under Chapter 5, Article 2.5, Flood Protection Corridor Program of the Safe Drinking Water, Clean Water, Watershed Protection, and Flood Control Act of 2000 (Proposition 13). By providing \$4,994,000 in grant funds, the Program will reduce risks of flood damage to 229 residents in the Kelso Creek Floodplain. The Program will also provide the opportunity for the development of a wildlife corridor linking existing globally and nationally recognized bird areas.

The Kelso Creek area is located in Weldon, a small community east of Lake Isabella, in Kern County. It is well established that Kelso Creek is one of California's top habitat protection opportunities, and that the Kelso Creek wash is subject to flood flows which are beyond the ability of the current project to safely handle and the local community to financially support.

In short, the Kern County Water Agency Improvement District No. 3 Flood Protection Corridor Program provides for the following:

- Decrease in flood risks for residences located in an area that cannot reasonably be made safe from future flooding,
- Removal of homes from the floodplain since there are willing sellers who would like to move out of "harm's way", and
- Acquisitions of available properties that will enhance wildlife value of the area, and benefit the downstream agricultural lands.

Background

About 30 years ago, a flood control levee, approximately 13,000 feet long was constructed of the native sandy sediment materials to protect a residential area in the Weldon area, east of Lake Isabella. The area had been hit by floods in 1966 and 1969 which caused significant damage to the tract. However, the capacity of the levee is approximately 2,500 cfs, which is less than a 10-year flood (the 100-year flood event has been estimated at 22,700 cfs). Due to the topography and the levee design, high flows from Kelso Creek could pass around and behind the levee, as well as overtop it, and occupy its full natural floodplain. Although many years are dry in Southern California resulting in no flow in Kelso Creek, it has taken significant flood fighting efforts to maintain the levee and protect the residences during the Kelso Creek flood events that have occurred.

Specific Problems

- Difficult to fund O&M costs of existing flood control improvements owing to:
 - Flood control improvements which are easily damaged by the flow of water in Kelso Creek, thereby requiring frequent and relatively costly repairs.
 - Relatively small number of property owners with relatively low assessed valuation of the benefited properties.
 - High number of low-income and retired residents who can't afford to pay for levee improvements.
 - Legislation which has limited the Improvement District's ability to collect revenue.
- Inadequate protection afforded by existing flood control improvements (less than 10-year runoff event) and assessed valuation would not likely support economic feasibility of any material improvement in the level of protection (based on past studies).
- Liability respecting downstream properties, i.e., outside of the Improvement District.
- Levee design does not provide any protection from potential floods from Short, Cholla, or Cane canyons. Short Canyon flooded in 1984, destroyed three homes, and left up to 8 feet of sediment.
- Ongoing use of resources is necessary to monitor rainwater flows, and for flood fighting and evacuation efforts to prevent losses.

Project Description

Components of the Program include:

- Purchase Improved Properties
- Purchase Flowage Easements and Floodproofing
- Purchase Unimproved Property

Homeowners will be provided with two options; sell their property and leave the wash area, or accept a flowage easement across their property, floodproof their home and stay. The program is totally voluntary. Those not wanting to participate will be allowed to do so. Based on responses from the public outreach program to date, the majority of the homeowners responding are in favor of the buy-out option.

Summary

The Kern County Water Agency Improvement District No. 3 Flood Protection Corridor Program provides an opportunity to resolve a hazardous condition that has created hardship for the community for forty years. In addition to reducing property damage, the program provides a unique opportunity to link highly desired wildlife habitat areas along the South Fork of the Kern River with mountain and desert wilderness areas. We have worked closely with the citizen Advisory Committee in developing the Program and have their strong support. We have held two Public Meetings to gauge support. We have also discussed the project with the Department of Fish and Game, Bureau of Land Management, and the Audubon Kern River Preserve Manager, who have all expressed interest in seeing this land revert to natural habitat. We believe this program not only provides direct flood control benefits to the primary program participants, but others recognize that the program's components are needed to address globally important wildlife issues.

We appreciate the significant challenge facing your staff in reviewing the number of applications that the Department of Water Resources will receive. We have included 15 copies of the application and one CD for your review. If you have any questions regarding our application, please contact Rick Iger at (661) 634-1469.

Sincerely,

Thomas N. Clark
General Manager
Enclosures
CC: Bonnie Ross, DWR Sacramento