

VENTURA FLOODSAFE WORKSHOP SUMMARY

JULY 21, 2008

OVERVIEW

The Department of Water Resources (DWR) FloodSAFE California Program sponsored a series of workshops to present information on the FloodSAFE Strategic Plan and related projects and regulations. Eight meetings were held throughout the State: four within the Central Valley and four outside the Central Valley. The Ventura workshop was held on July 21, 2008. The workshop agenda included:

- FloodSAFE Program Update
- Federal Flood Control Subventions Program Regulations Update
- Discussion

FloodSAFE PROGRAM UPDATE

Ken Kirby, Executive Advisor to DWR, presented highlights of the FloodSAFE Program and public review draft Strategic Plan. Key elements of the Strategic Plan include: a vision statement, goals, foundational and near-term objectives, guiding principles, implementing partners and stakeholders, and an implementation framework. These key elements support the four action areas for the FloodSAFE program:

- improve emergency response
- inform and assist the public
- improve flood management systems
- improve operation and maintenance

In seeking to provide the multiple benefits outlined in the FloodSAFE vision, policy decision-makers and flood management professionals must consider and balance the outcomes identified in the FloodSAFE program goals:

- reduce the chance of flooding
- reduce the consequences of flooding
- sustain economic growth
- protect and enhance ecosystems
- promote sustainability

Twelve foundational, longer-term objectives and ten near-term objectives create an action plan for achieving those goals. To maximize the effectiveness of flood management decisions and investments, proposals must be considered in the context of the guiding principles, which promote: system-wide approaches, multiple benefits, integration with land-use and regional planning, natural processes and functions, equitable access to decision-making, informed understanding of flood risks, and adaptation to climate change.

The FloodSAFE program overview included a discussion of flood risk, defined by both the likelihood (probability) of flooding and the consequences of flooding. Through FloodSAFE program components and local actions, flood risk can be significantly reduced; however, some residual risk will always exist (no matter how small it may be). Residual risk represents the possibility of flood events that exceed the capacity of flood management systems.

The presentation also included bond funding allocations. Much of the bond funding is dedicated to the Central Valley due to legislative emphasis on the State-federal flood control system in the Central Valley and the Delta. In addition to geographic boundaries, FloodSAFE priorities are also tied to land use categories, such as urban and urbanizing areas, non-urban areas, and broad, system-wide areas that include complex land-use and/or environmental considerations. The FloodSAFE team is continuing to develop additional guidelines on investment strategies and cost-sharing approaches.

Also discussed were recent accomplishments in the FloodSAFE program including improvements in DWR's emergency response capabilities, early implementation projects, and other programs to evaluate and improve flood management systems, channel maintenance, and workshops and public outreach materials. Lastly, near-term future activities were discussed, including completion of the Strategic Plan. Workshop participants were invited to submit comments on the Strategic Plan through July 25, 2008.

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SUBVENTIONS

Terri Wegener, Statewide Grants Branch Chief, recapped the Federal Flood Control Subventions Program. This program reimburses local agencies for a portion of the non-federal costs associated with federally authorized flood control projects, including watershed protection flood prevention projects administered by the Natural Resource Conservation Service. Traditionally, the program has reimbursed for a base 50% of the non-federal costs. As a result of Assembly Bill (AB) 1147, an additional 20% (for a total of 70% of non-federal costs) can be granted for projects that increase or enhance the level of protection for:

- habitat
- open space
- recreation
- impoverished areas
- state transportation and water supply facilities

Implementing regulations for AB 1147 are currently being developed, and workshop participants were invited to submit comments on the proposed regulations by July 28, 2008.

DISCUSSION

Scope of Strategic Plan

Q: Why is 200-year flood mapping being done, instead of using existing 100- and 500-year floodplain maps?

A: The FEMA maps are intended for actuarial (insurance) purposes, not for land-use planning. The 100-year level of flood protection had been deemed too low for planning purposes, especially for urban areas. The California legislature now requires 200-year flood protection for urban areas in the Central Valley to approve development. The mapping process is dynamic and is always subject to update as new information becomes available.

Comment: Even 200-year flood protection may not be enough.

Q: Will areas outside the Central Valley face similar 200-year requirements?

A: While DWR encourages all urban land-use planning entities to adopt a similar requirement, currently only Central Valley communities are subject to this requirement.

Q: Does guiding principle #7 consider the 11-year cycle of solar flares as well?

A: The team will look into this question, but climatology specifics are unknown.

Q: Have you reached out to the insurance industry?

A: The insurance industry was involved in development of the legislation. While the team has not heard of other outreach, this may take place in the future.

Comment: Rather than require insurance, we might need to reduce risk.

Response: Risk can be reduced by decreasing the probability of flooding or the consequences (damages) of flooding. By reducing the probability of flooding (i.e., increasing flood protection), insurance rates may be lower for those protected individuals. Protected individuals may still choose to carry flood insurance to cover their residual risk, such as a homeowner carrying insurance in a levee-protected X-zone, where insurance is not required.

Q: Will the Central Valley component consider the seven dams along the Sierra?

A: SB5 does not explicitly include reservoirs, but it is clear that reservoir operation has significant influence on the flood protection system on the valley floor. In addition, reservoir re-operation is mandated with respect to water supply, not just flood management.

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Q: If \$5 billion is not enough, what is the expected need?

A: Estimates of \$20 billion have been made, but that is a rough number. Refinement will, in part, come from a statewide flood management needs assessment. We also need to determine how we will fund needed improvements.

Q: Will there be State funding vis-à-vis federal funding?

A: State funding for projects with a federal interest comes from (1) the subventions program and (2) grant assistance for the non-federal share of participation in federal feasibility studies. The State is already helping to fund feasibility studies on a number of projects.

Q: Is the definition of urban (i.e., population of 10,000) based on a particular size of area?

A: According to California code, 'urban area' means a developed area in which there are 10,000 residents or more, and 'developed area' has the same meaning as that set forth in Section 59.1 of Title 44 of the Code of Federal Regulations, which includes population density. Thinking beyond the definitions, large urban areas inherently have more lives and assets to protect, resulting in greater benefit for the investment of State funds.

Comment: As one of several watershed coordinators statewide, I would suggest a more thorough incorporation of the term "watershed" into materials and discussion.

Response: Please consider providing specific thoughts about where such inclusions would be appropriate in the draft Strategic Plan.

Q: Will there be another Flood Protection Corridor Program funding cycle in the current fiscal year?

A: We hope so, but it is not certain. Currently, there are discussions about this assistance program being administered by another, undetermined state agency. Budget discussions are now underway.

Q: Has California come to a final resolution with respect to the Corps' [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers] levee vegetation policy?

A: Discussions are still on-going.

Comment: The local levee evaluation program probably did not receive a lot of interest due to the short application period. Several prospective applicants elected to take extra time to prepare a better proposal for a future cycle.

Comment: Emphasizing sustainability is highly important. Confinement of a moving water body without accounting for sediment load will result in increased maintenance requirements.

Q: Is there funding assistance for local agencies outside the Central Valley for flood mitigation efforts (e.g., mapping)?

A: DWR administers several statewide grant programs. Funding for enhanced flood management planning is a component of the Integrated Regional Water Management program. The Urban Streams Restoration Program funds projects that reduce urban flooding and erosion, restore environmental values, and promote stewardship of urban streams. The Flood Protection Corridor Program funds nonstructural flood management projects that include wildlife habitat enhancement and/or agricultural land preservation.

Comment: The Los Angeles area is so large, it is difficult to get funding to the level of flood planning entities.

Response: Please send in thoughts that can help FloodSAFE consider statewide planning implications at local levels, regardless of size.

Comment: Regarding sustainability in "true" urban areas, FloodSAFE/flood management should consider groundwater recharge and local source water, in the spirit of truly integrated water management.

Response: IRWM guidelines include significant emphasis on those concepts.

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Q: When will we see the IRWM guidelines?

A: The guidelines partly depend on the budget process, which is going slowly. Once a budget is signed, DWR will have some additional work to do before the public release of guidelines.

Q: What is the timing for future urban streams grants?

A: This is tied up in the budget process also, but information will be released as soon as the budget is resolved and the guidelines have been finalized.

Q: Is there an update on the statewide flood management planning contract?

A: This is on hold pending program budget discussions. DWR is working on the scope with California State Association of Counties (CSAC) and County Engineers Association of California (CEAC). DWR may host a pre-advertisement workshop to help prospective consultants understand the scope of the proposed contract.

Q: Are you working with CSAC/CEAC on the statewide needs assessment?

A: Yes, but CSAC/CEAC will serve with DWR in an advisory role, with the previously-discussed needs assessment comprising part of the broader effort.

Subventions

Q: What if a project has not gone through the federal feasibility process? Can the project still receive subventions funding?

A: Not through the subventions program; however, the legislature may direct DWR to provide funding to specific efforts.

Q: Will subventions continue to have future funding cycles?

A: Yes, we do expect to receive future funding from Proposition 1E. Also, we are processing claims as quickly as possible for past projects.