



The Sacramento Bee

Corps spares levee trees

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SACRAMENTO -- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has dropped a deadline that could have forced 32 Valley flood control districts to cut down trees on their levees by March 30.

The action came Thursday at a meeting of state and federal agencies, after a Sacramento conference that covered much of the available science on levee vegetation.

In February, the corps said that 32 Central Valley levee districts failed its national maintenance policy, which was being applied in California for the first time. Many failed because local policy has encouraged tree planting to improve wildlife habitat. The corps policy allows no plants larger than 2 inches in diameter.

A more flexible policy is promised by year-end. But recognizing that time is running out, the corps dropped the compliance deadline for vegetation problems. For other issues -- erosion, pest control, structure encroachment -- the March 30 deadline stands, said Col. Tom Chapman, corps district commander.

"All along, we have only had public safety in mind," Chapman said. "Our hope is that we can be in alliance with all the science."

-- *Matt Weiser*