

California Department of Water Resources NEWS

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Levee Impacts of Chinese Mitten Crabs

As large number of Chinese mitten crabs migrate west through the Delta toward San Francisco Bay for spawning, a Department of Water Resources flood management official summarized the current status of levee impacts of the crabs.

Keith Luster, Chief of Field Operations in DWR's Flood Project Inspection Section, provided this statement:

Currently we have no reported information from local levee maintenance agencies that support detrimental damage to the integrity of the 1,600 miles of Federal Project levees from the Chinese Mitten Crab.

The existence of the crab and its tendency to burrow shallow holes into earthen material is an activity that's shared by other life forms along our waterways i.e. crayfish, bank swallows and gophers. These creatures and their shallow burrowing habits could create surface erosion that is easily detectable during routine maintenance inspections.

The more pressing concerns are the animals that burrow deep into or under the earthen levee structures i.e., beavers, ground squirrels. These animals create potential voids of various size and patterns. The voids have the potential to pipe water and erode internally which could lead to levee subsidence (dropping), overtopping and, worst case scenario, failure.

DWR plans to communicate with local maintenance agencies to ensure that any field experiences with the crab are documented and forwarded to our department for further review.

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The Department of Water Resources operates and maintains the State Water Project, provides dam safety and flood control and inspection services, assists local water districts in water management and water conservation planning, and plans for future statewide water needs. The State Water Project provides water to two-thirds of California's population.

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