Meeting Notes

Natural Resources Institute of the University of the Pacific

Dialog on Future Development in the Flood Plain, Friday, October 27, 2006

Introduction and Welcome: Ravi Jain, Dean, College of Engineering and Computer Science; Tom Zuckerman, Regent, University of the Pacific; Margit Aramburu, Director, Natural Resources Institute; Calvin Chen, Assistant Professor, School of Engineering and Computer Science.

Self-introductions and identification of issues:

Senator Mike Machado

- Too many of the actions taken are done serially, with nothing coming together. Everyone does things individually without working together. Someone may get help one time, but not another.
- Politically, if it continues to grow serially, we will encounter the same problems as today.
- We must look at a comprehensive list of all the components that have to come together and how they are inter-related, including water conveyance.
- The most apparent problem is flood control, keeping in mind that the demands on the water infrastructure extend beyond flood season. We need a regional flood control strategy.
- We also have to look how governments will be a factor, i.e. land use designations and levels of protection.

Dante Nomellini, CDWA:

- There is definitely a flood challenge out there, with a general desire in both government institutions and in people for better flood control.
- There is a misplaced focus on new standards; we need to meet the existing standards.
- The state is focused on liability, not protection.
- We need to utilize our existing resources, and work with what’s there already.
- We need to evaluate what it is we want to do to improve flood control on an area-by-area basis. There is no general standard that exists. Changing standards will incur monumental costs in infrastructure changes.
- It’s important to keep in mind that we can’t just look at urban areas; everything is inter-related.
- The State needs better flood fight capacity.

Mike Hardesty, CCVFCA:

- Lack of funding is a key issue.
- There exists a much broader list of problems. We need a long-term plan from the State on what we want to do.
- What we’ve failed to do is make sure everyone realizes that flood control is everyone’s problem.
- The system is divided too much into too many entities, all with competing interests.

Max Sakato, RD 1500:

- Funding is a key issue; over time, maintenance is not possible with existing costs.
- Now, instead of serving a small set of landowners, this is now part of a bigger picture for the state.
- The issue of liability for faulty levees must be addressed.
Ron Davis, ACWA:

- These are very complex local and state issues.
- We need to look at new and old cities when talking about standards, since older cities were built with old standards.
- We need to coordinate with federal agencies.

Jonas Minton, PCL:

- We have to look into the future, and not just the past.
- We need to consider global warming and climate changes.
- We need to minimize losses in flood events, because we cannot prevent flooding, and we need to preserve the environment.

Donald Troppmann, Richland:

- Local interests are looking for assurances that the process will hold.

Mike Conner, SFEI:

- Want to ensure understanding that Bay area governments are buying into these concerns, and definitely want to work together on these issues.
- We need to address global warming and sea level rise.
- There is a lack of clear measures, and have trouble communicating this to general public.
- We need to have overarching framework with clear performance measures to effectively communicate this, with better articulation. We need to make the science more explicit.

Marci Coglianese, former Mayor of City of Rio Vista, member of Flood Plain Task Force:

- We have a 19th century government structure that is not equipped to deal with 21st century problems.
- Local government does not understand that FEMA maps are not updated.
- The issue of liability is critical.

Marcia Carlock, Department of Boating and Waterways:

- We need to consider recreation.
- We must give enough attention to the science portion of the process; the average citizen doesn’t comprehend all the issues.
- There are many aspects out there that focus on individual needs, without taking into account overall picture.

Tim Washburn, SAFCA:

- While it is true that the parts have to link to a whole, we have to deliver the parts.
- We need standards for three areas: urban development, small communities, and rural areas.
- To address funding needs, consider a regional assessment district.
- Liability could be addressed through requirement of mandatory flood insurance for all property owners.
Chris Neudeck, KSN, Inc., Engineer Active in Levee Projects

- We need to have clear standards, so we can have targets to set projects forward; we should start by providing consistent 100 year flood protection.
- We also need consistent, reliable funding. The dollars in the local hands have gone a long way.

David Shabazian, SACOG:

- SACOG has adopted a “blueprint” for regional growth; a smart growth plan. We need to be responsible in how we grow, especially addressing floodplain areas.
- And additional concern is emergency response procedures; this is related to transportation issues.
- SACOF supports the SAFCA White Paper.

Susan Trebess, Staff of Assemblywoman Lois Wolk:

- Review key issues raised in last year’s legislative hearings.
- With the new flood issues, the state had no say.
- The body that is liable should also be accountable for the decisions.
- Supports incorporation of science, policy and politics into a State Flood Plan.

Brian White, Department of Water Resources:

- A big challenge is just how to group everyone’s ideas, how to get everyone’s thoughts together. There are many stakeholders.

Dennis O’Conner (spoke as an individual):

- Many things change with time--rules, economics, risks, ecosystems and their functions. We need to look at systemwide effects of changes.

Jim Metropulos, Sierra Club:

- Californians want to have the natural areas integrated into their environment, not be separate and set-off.
- Need to address local versus State liability.

Ricardo Pineda, Department of Water Resources:

- We know that the 1% floodplain on the FIRM maps was defined just by the levees, as they were grandfathered in when FEMA and NFIP took over. These delineations may not be necessarily accurate.
- Many people are unaware that they are in risk areas; thus we need to make it clear that more people need to carry flood insurance.
- The Army Corps of Engineers cannot keep up with the costs needed to update and maintain needed measures.
Sergio Guillen, CALFED:

- We need to make sure we keep the partnerships intact, and utilize existing partnerships.
- Other big issues are weather changes in the future and sea level rise.

Tom Flinn, San Joaquin County Department of Public Works:

- Need to address liability issues
- Need to broaden financial support to maintain project and non-project levees.
- Need to address State versus federal standards.
- Identified permitting and environmental processes as challenges to timely and cost-effective maintenance.

Tom Gau, San Joaquin County Department of Public Works:

- Noted relationship between land uses and flood control

Roger Churchwell, San Joaquin County Department of Public Works:

- Need a systemwide Flood Control Plan.
- Need better State and federal coordination.
- Flood insurance does not address costs of flood-damaged infrastructure, such as roads.

General Discussion

From the discussions and sharing this morning, there are similar issues that are shared by many:

- Land use is a major issue. This requires much coordination with various entities (including transportation, construction). It requires looking at how local agencies operate under larger (county, federal) arenas.
- The State needs an integrated plan for the entire state.
- The only way the system will work and be maintained is if there is revenue sharing between state and local agencies.

Topic: Do local entities have representation in larger discussions on these issues?

- There appears to be adequate representation in SACOG and AJCOG, but not for rural areas in ABAG.
- The concept of COGS as the flood-planning unit is not embraced by all legislators.
- There needs to be uniformity in these groups.
- FEMA is in the process of creating wholesale, digitized FIRM maps. Until that is completed and ready, everybody has outdated maps. Maps are supposed to be updated within 5 years.
- The State Reclamation Board has had the duty to designate the floodplain, but they have not.

Topic: Development Issues:

- There are a lot of developments that are going into areas that were not designated for urban developments.
- Non-urban counties are going urban because of fiscal pressures.
California has and will continue to lose attenuation areas if development is not controlled. Losses from Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana are an example of this: natural wetland areas were eliminated slowly by development.

Developers have been pushing the floodplains outward and re-defining them. They can use private funding to build levees, and thus re-define the flood maps to their needs.

Topic: Coordination with State and Federal Entities:

- The Department of Water Resources has a set of drawings showing design requirements. With this, we have an obligation to make sure that the levees can meet the levels from the ’57 flood profiles. DWR also has levee specs to meet this water surface level.
- There needs to be local responsibility for maintenance and updates. Proposition 218’s taxation constraints may restrict access to taxes for this purpose.

Topic: Does California have a State Flood Plan? Does California need a State Flood Plain?

- There are design specs, not a plan.
- A State Flood Plan needs to be created. This needs to be comprehensive, unlike past studies.
- There needs to be a consensus on what the plan should be, and what it should include.
- The plan needs to be more than just identification of specs, qualifications, and processes; it has to be a real-life plan.
- Prop. 218 is a constraint to funding.
- We need to pass a state plan, and then give it to the local entities to comply. We don’t need to dictate exact standards in the plan; rather, we need to pass it with minimum standards.
- As long as entities are not compromising the minimum standards, they won’t be liable.

Action Items:

- A Drafting Committee will meet and develop consensus issues to be discussed by the full group; products of Drafting Committee will be sent in advance of the next meeting.
- Outcomes of funding measures on the November 7 ballot will be discussed.
- A follow up meeting will be held: Monday, November 20, 2006.