

COMPLETE STATEMENT OF

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

BEFORE THE

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Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings
and Emergency Management
and the
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
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Introduction

I am Mr. Steven L. Stockton, Deputy Director of Civil Works for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and a registered Professional Engineer. I am pleased to be here today and to have the opportunity to speak to you about the National Dam Safety Program and proposed National Levee Safety Program. My testimony today will provide a brief discussion of the benefits of the programs, the need for establishment of a National Levee Safety Program, update for the current USACE Levee Safety Program, and the coordination efforts between the Corps, FEMA, and others in the Flood Risk Management Program.

Background

In the 1970's the failure of Teton Dam, Kelly Barnes Dam, and others emphasized the need for a coordinated Federal and State program for dam safety. Starting with inspections and inventory of dams across the nation, this program developed into the National Dam Safety Program that exists today with 49 of the 50 States having state agencies that regulate dams, the Interagency Committee on Dam Safety (ICODS), and the National Dam Safety Review Board (NDSRB). Like the dam failures in the 1970's, the levee and floodwall failures associated with Hurricane Katrina and the major levee repair needs in California, emphasize the need for a National Levee Safety Program and state levee regulatory agencies.

Benefits of the Programs

The National Dam Safety Program provides benefits to the nation by reducing risks to life and property from dam failure through an effective program that brings together the expertise and resources of the Federal and non-Federal communities in achieving hazard reduction. These benefits are being achieved through the publication of various technical guidelines for the dam owner; training of dam safety professionals on inspection and evaluation of dams; cooperative research; and publication of the National Inventory of Dams. The program has allowed the

Corps to leverage its resources through work with other Federal agencies and with the various states. The Program has improved state dam safety programs by providing a forum for the states to share information. The National Inventory of Dams provides valuable information for over 80,000 dams in the United States.

Just as the National Dam Safety Program has improved dam safety across the country, the establishment of a parallel National Levee Safety Program would improve levee safety across the country. Such a program would provide support to new state agencies being established to regulate levees. This program would bring the expertise and resources of the Federal and non-Federal communities together in achieving levee safety hazard reduction. The program would not be an overnight fix for levee safety but would take some time to grow to maturity; just like it has taken 25 years for the dam safety program to grow to maturity. The first step in establishing a levee safety program will be inventorying and assessing the levees. The Corps is taking that first step with supplemental appropriations provided in Fiscal Year 2006 to inventory levees in the Corps program and develop risk based methodology for the assessment of these levees. Just like the National Inventory of Dams, the National Inventory of Levees would be dynamic and would require the cooperation of all Federal levee owning agencies, the States, the Indian tribal governments, local government agencies, and the private sector to account for all the levees that provide both protection and present a hazard to the public.

Current USACE Inventory & Assessments

The current Corps inventory is being completed in phases. The initial phase consisted of a survey questionnaire to determine vital information for the levees, such as number of levees, location, level of protection, most recent rating, and more. Of the approximately 2000 levee segments from the initial survey, approximately 56% were found to be acceptable, 38% minimally acceptable, and 6% unacceptable or of maintenance concern. This fiscal year, we have continued with phases II and III. Phase II consisted of five pilot districts, including Sacramento, where detailed survey work was performed and subsequent population of the geospatial database. Lessons learned from the pilot districts have been used to estimate the number and miles of levees that could be surveyed with the remaining funding from the supplemental appropriation. Based on the analysis of the results, the remaining funding would provide for surveying and geospatial database work for approximately 6,500 miles in addition to the surveys performed in Phase II. By the end of fiscal year 2007, approximately two-thirds of the Corps levee inventory will have been surveyed and information uploaded into the National Levee Database.

USACE is currently developing a risk based methodology for the assessment of the levee inventory. Currently the methodology is undergoing field testing through the spring and summer. Methodology is being tested at the pilot Districts where information is available in the new geospatial database. This risk assessment methodology will be ready to use on all levees in Fiscal Year 2008.

Coordination with FEMA

From the onset we have been coordinating our Inventory and Assessment Program with FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program map modernization program. Levees have been the primary nexus that brought about this coordination. Corps program decisions can have major impacts to FEMA programs and vice versa. Guidance documents, program guidance memoranda, and other critical decisions have been coordinated among the two agencies prior to implementation.

More specifically, the Corps has been collaborating with FEMA on levee certification for their National Flood Insurance Program. Under that program, the levee owners are responsible for

completing the necessary requirements for certification. The Corps has the authority to complete this work on levees that the Corps owns and operates; however although we have the authority to do the certifications for others, we have no simple mechanism to receive funds from levee owners who request our engineering support for levee certification.

We have also established the Flood Risk Management Program that goes beyond coordinating our levee activities with FEMA. The program will integrate and synchronize the ongoing, diverse flood risk management projects, programs and authorities of the US Army Corps of Engineers, and with counterpart projects, programs and authorities of FEMA, other Federal agencies, state organizations, and regional and local agencies. Coordination is occurring with FEMA and major non-federal flood risk management stakeholders.

Proposed National Levee Safety Program

Notwithstanding the Administration's concerns with the proposed Water Resources Development Act currently under consideration by Congress, I would like to present the Corps' factual assessment of that bill's proposed National Levee Safety Program (S1248, Subtitle C, sections 2051 through 2055). The proposed program is modeled after the current National Dam Safety Act. The legislation would establish a national committee of Federal, State, Tribal, local, and private representatives to advise the Secretary of the Army on levee safety matters. This committee would lead the development of Federal and State standards for levee safety and the establishment of a model for State levee safety programs. The committee would draw on the expertise and knowledge of the National Dam Safety Review Board and the Interagency Committee on Dam Safety in the development of the program. Substantial changes that were added to the National Dam Safety Act in 2006 would be included in the levee program from its beginning.

The inclusion of an assessment of each levee in the inventory could enhance the value of the inventory when used by various emergency agencies and local governments during times of natural disasters. The assessments could allow the first responders to focus their actions in critical areas where failures are most likely to occur, potentially saving time and lives in emergency situations. In addition, these assessments could provide information to assist local governments, public utilities, and private individuals when making investment decisions concerning property protected by the levees.

If the proposed legislation is enacted in its current version, authorization of appropriations would be included for a national levee inventory (\$50,000,000), levee assessments (\$424,000,000), assistance to state programs (\$35,000,000), levee research (\$2,000,000), and for levee safety training (\$1,000,000).

Conclusion

We are committed to continuing to improve the safety of Federal dams and levees; continuing to cooperate with the other Federal and non Federal agencies to reduce the risk to public safety in areas located below dams and behind levees; continuing to help decision makers set priorities for future dam and levee safety investments; and continuing to ensure that all Americans can make more informed decisions on building homes, locating businesses, and purchasing flood insurance based on the actual risk of flood and storm damages where they live.

This concludes my statement. Again, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

