

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Delta Islands and Levees Feasibility Study Update

Summary: On April 14, 2014, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Sacramento District released its draft *Delta Islands and Levees Feasibility Study Report and Environmental Impact Statement*. This report: (1) identifies flood risk management and ecosystem restoration problems and opportunities in the Delta; (2) develops and evaluates measures to solve identified problems; (3) formulates and compares alternatives for ecosystem restoration; and (4) identifies a Tentatively Selected Plan for implementation. The Tentatively Selected Plan would restore about 90 acres of tidal marsh by disposing of dredged sediment in shallow water at Big Break and Little Franks Tract. Council staff reviewed the report and provided comments in a letter dated June 2, 2014.

A panel of representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of Water Resources will provide an overview of this Feasibility Study and present the Tentatively Selected Plan to the Council.

Background

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) initiated the Delta Islands and Levees Feasibility Study (Feasibility Study) in 2006 at the request of the Department of Water Resources (DWR), the non-federal sponsor for this study. The USACE is the lead agency for the Feasibility Study and is also the lead under the National Environmental Policy Act. Numerous other agencies, organizations, and individuals have participated in the study, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The purpose of the Feasibility Study is to determine if there is federal interest in providing funding for and implementing flood risk management and ecosystem restoration improvements in the Delta.

On April 14, 2014, the USACE's Sacramento District released the draft Feasibility Study and Environmental Impact Statement for public review (Attachment 1). This report: (1) identifies flood risk management and ecosystem restoration problems and opportunities in the Delta; (2) develops and evaluates measures to solve identified problems; (3) formulates and compares alternatives for ecosystem restoration; and (4) identifies a Tentatively Selected Plan (TSP) for implementation.

The report identified a federal interest in one ecosystem restoration alternative, but no federal interest in flood risk management for the Delta or other habitat restoration activities. The flood risk management alternatives the USACE considered, but is not recommending included improving levees to protect Bethel Island, Walnut Grove, Isleton, and Discovery Bay, the communities where the USACE determined the most valuable assets were at risk from flooding. These alternatives did not meet the USACE's criteria for cost effectiveness because the costs of the levee improvements

exceeded the value of the assets that would be protected from flooding. Setting back levees as proposed in the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) was considered, but was rejected, partly because the cost of habitat that would be restored was high when compared to other USACE restoration projects. Tidal marsh restoration proposed for the BDCP's Restoration Opportunity Areas was not among the ecosystem restoration alternatives that were considered because the study protocol assumed those restoration projects would occur without USACE assistance.

Tentatively Selected Plan (TSP)

The USACE has identified a TSP for ecosystem restoration in the Delta based on the outcome of this Feasibility Study and the following constraints, identified in the study:

- Formulated alternatives and the recommended plan must not impede the BDCP; and
- Formulated alternatives and the recommended plan must not be dependent upon the BDCP.

The TSP seeks to restore approximately 89.5 acres of lost or degraded tidal marsh habitat in the west/central portion of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The restoration work would involve transporting and placing dredged material into shallow open water habitat to restore 80.3 acres and 9.2 acres of tidal marsh at Big Break and Little Franks Tract, respectively, in the Delta. The work would be conducted over five years as part of the annual operation and maintenance (O&M) dredging of the Stockton Deep Water Ship Channel. Previously stockpiled dredged material from existing dredged material storage sites would also be placed in conjunction with O&M.

Council Staff Comments

On June 2, 2014, Council staff provided a comment letter for this draft Delta Islands and Levees Feasibility Study Report and Environmental Impact Statement (Attachment 2). In summary, we commended the USACE's effort for identifying the federal interest in the Delta and planning a project to restore tidal marsh habitat. At the same time, we also provided comments, recommendations and concerns related to the Feasibility Study and TSP as a result of the planning procedures and planning constraints used by the USACE.

Today's Briefing

A panel of representatives from USACE and DWR will brief the Council on the Feasibility Study and next steps to implement this study.

The panel members include:

1. Brooke Schlenker, Planning Division, USACE Sacramento District
2. Mark Cowan, Planning Division, USACE Sacramento District
3. Dave Mraz, Chief of Delta Levees and Environmental Engineering Branch, DWR

Staff Recommendations for Next Steps

1. Coordinate outcomes of this briefing and the Feasibility Study with the Council's work on developing Priorities for Delta Levee Investments.
2. Work with USACE on existing state-federal partnerships to explore and identify additional state-federal joint interests and carry out projects that will create multiple benefits to regional water supply reliability, transportation corridor protection, critical infrastructure safety, risk reduction through flood-proofing, and ecosystem enhancement and restoration, all of which are vital components to California's, and the nation's, economic stability and environmental sustainability.
3. Coordinate and offer assistance to USACE to evaluate the existing USACE's planning procedure and policy constraints that have prevented the USACE from considering priority habitat restoration areas and from finding a federal interest in flood management in the Delta.

List of Attachments

- Attachment 1: Executive Summary from the Draft Delta Islands and Levees Feasibility Study Report and Environmental Impact Statement, Dated April 14, 2014
- Attachment 2: Council's Comment Letter for the Draft Delta Islands and Levees Feasibility Study Report and Environmental Impact Statement, Dated June 2, 2014

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