



## **INFORMATION ITEM**

### **Delta Levees: Challenges and Opportunities**

#### Summary

The Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta (Delta) is of critical importance to California’s people, ecosystems, and economy. Much of the State relies on the water conveyance infrastructure that runs through and from the Delta, bringing drinking water to 27 million people and irrigation to farms throughout the Central Valley. Over 550,000 people live in the Delta in environments that range from rural agricultural towns to legacy communities and urban areas, while the Delta provides sanctuary for more than 750 plant and animal species, including critical and endangered migratory birds and salmon. It is also an inherently flood-prone area created by the confluence of five major rivers. Studies show that Sacramento and Stockton, two major urban areas within the Delta, are rated among the highest flood risk cities in the nation.

The Council was created to advance the State’s coequal goals for the Delta - a more reliable statewide water supply and a healthy and protected ecosystem. The coequal goals cannot be achieved without a robust Delta levee system. The Council has a critical role in elevating and educating the community and partner agencies about the challenges and opportunities associated with flood risk in the Delta. In this capacity, the Council convenes subject matter experts and decision makers to advance issues and remove barriers to reducing risk.

#### Background

##### Delta Levees

The Delta is home to more than 600,000 people and is comprised of approximately 1,300 square miles of low-lying, flood-prone lands bound by 1,100 miles of levees.

Delta levees and the governance overseeing them form a complex system. Delta levees can be publicly or privately owned, but all Californians benefit from the services they provide. Delta levees are the foundation of the coequal goals,

reducing flood risk to people, property, water supply, the Delta ecosystem, and infrastructure of statewide importance, while providing habitat and recreational opportunities.

By way of background, the construction of Delta levees began in the 1850s. By the 1920s, most of what had once been a network of low-lying islands had been reclaimed and turned into farmland. Local reclamation districts managed the levees largely unaided until 1972, when a catastrophic levee failure on Brannan Island disrupted water exports for over a month. In response, the State began investing in Delta levee maintenance and improvements. Since that time, State investments have greatly reduced the chance of levee failure; however, flood risk remains.

During 2024, a number of significant levee-related issues have transpired, including: 1) the Council's Delta Levees Investment Strategy was enacted; 2) the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released draft changes to their levee vegetation best practices; and 3) Proposition 4 was placed on the November 5, 2024, General Election ballot and includes \$150 million for levee improvements and climate resiliency projects in the Delta. With these in mind, the Council will hear an overview of issues related to Delta levees, from three members of the flood management community. They will discuss their role in Delta levees governance and challenges in maintaining the system.

Furthermore, the October 28, 2024, Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee (DPIIC) meeting will be focused on Delta levees with this panel also opening the DPIIC meeting.

#### [Delta Reform Act Requirements and Authority](#)

The Delta Reform Act requires the Delta Plan to attempt to reduce risks to people, property, and State interests in the Delta by promoting effective emergency preparedness, appropriate land uses, and strategic levee investments. (Wat. Code, § 85305, subd. (a).) In addition, the Delta Reform Act requires the Council to recommend in the Delta Plan priorities for State investments in levee operation, maintenance, and improvements in the Delta, including both project levees, which are a part of the State Plan of Flood Control, and nonproject levees, which are not a part of the State Plan of Flood Control. (Wat. Code, § 85306.)

## Information about the Topic

At today's meeting the Council will hear from three members of the Delta flood management community:

- 1) Joseph Countryman, Board Member, Central Valley Flood Protection Board
- 2) Christopher Williams, Department of Water Resources, Principal Engineer for the Central Valley Flood Protection Plan; and
- 3) Thomas Zuckerman, Consultant, Central Delta Water Agency

Each speaker plays a distinct and important role in Delta levees management. The speakers will present a high-level overview of their roles and responsibilities, along with a discussion of challenges and opportunities facing the Delta's levees now and into the future.

Additionally, Amanda Bohl, special assistant for planning and science, will provide an overview of the other panels scheduled for the October 28, 2024, DPIIC gathering.

## Fiscal Information

Not applicable.

## List of Attachments

*Attachment 1: Delta Levees 101 Information Sheet*

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