INFORMATION ITEM

Flood Emergency Planning in the Delta

Summary

Flooding is a persistent major hazard for the Sacramento- San Joaquin Delta and Suisun Marsh and the summer of 2026 kickstarted what has now become the strongest El Niño on record. This El Niño system is projected to peak in temperature and intensity between November 2026 and January 2027 which will likely bring heavy rains and flooding to Northern California and exacerbate an already unacceptably high flood risk in the Delta. Emergency preparedness is a critical tool in reducing the potential impact of flooding. Three flood professionals will describe what considerations go into effective flood emergency planning in the unique context of the Delta, their agency's role in flood fighting, and explain how they are preparing for this year's flood season.

Background

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and Suisun Marsh (Delta) is home to more than 500,000 people and is comprised of approximately 1,300 square miles of low-lying, flood-prone lands bound by 1,100 miles of levees.

Given how flood prone the Delta is, there are many resources that help Delta residents and municipalities prepare for flooding. The Delta Protection Commission's Flood Ready website (deltafloodready.com) provides resources to help Delta residents prepare for flood events. The site helps Delta residents assess their flood risk, prepare flood readiness resources such as emergency kits, and identify county evacuation plans and services.

This panel is an opportunity for the Council and public to hear about the state of emergency preparedness prior to a probable flood occurring and to increase understanding of the players involved and associated roles and responsibilities.

Delta Reform Act Requirements and Authority

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Reform Act of 2009 (Wat. Code, § 85000 et seq.) directed the Council to attempt to reduce risks to people, property, and state interests in the Delta by promoting effective emergency preparedness in the Delta Plan (Wat. Code, §§ 85300; 85305, subd. (a).) In response, the Council adopted Delta Plan recommendation RR R1 - Implement Emergency Preparedness and Response and the corresponding administrative performance measure (RR R01-03) that calls for local agencies to develop flood emergency plans. Council also adopted the strategy to Prioritize investment in Delta Flood Management as well as recommendations RR R-3- Provide adequate State funds to support levee maintenance and improvement, RR-R5- Finance Local Flood Management Activities, and RR-R7- Fund Actions to Protect Infrastructure from Flooding and Other Natural Disasters.

Delta Adapts

The Delta Adapts Adaptation Plan proposes climate adaptation strategies for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and Suisun Marsh (Delta), recommends implementation agencies and partners, discusses tradeoffs in Delta adaptation, and presents several case studies that exemplify the recommended adaptation actions. The Adaptation Plan was approved by the Delta Stewardship Council in 2025 and includes recommendations for flood management in the Delta. The following recommendations and supporting actions from the Delta Adapts Adaptation Plan have direct ties to emergency management:

- FL-4: Improve Flood Emergency Preparedness and Response which has relevant the supporting actions of:
    - FL-4-1: Identifying emergency planning gaps and update response plans for underserved Delta communities.
    - FL-4-2: Working with local county offices of emergency services to develop robust flood fighting training programs.
    - FL-4-4: Strengthening and coordinating existing emergency response plans with local partners.
- FL-6: Effectively Communicate Flood Risks, Warnings, and Mitigation Strategies to All At-Risk Communities which has the relevant supporting actions of:

- FL-6-1: Developing clear communication channels and protocols for the timely dissemination of flood warnings and advisories.
- FL-6-2: Improving flood risk communication (overall risk, prediction updates, preparedness strategies) and information dissemination to diverse parties, including farmers, residents, and business owners.

Today's Presentation

Three flood emergency planning experts will discuss their respective roles in developing and implementing emergency action plans throughout the Delta. Emergency action planning is critical for protecting key infrastructure, such as levees, that the modern Delta relies on and for ensuring the continued achievement of the coequal goals (Wat. Code, § 85054.) while safeguarding Delta communities.

Elizabeth Ramos, Kjeldsen, Sinnock & Neudeck, Inc. (KSN, Inc.)

Elizabeth Ramos has over a decade of experience at KSN working with Reclamation Districts to help create and implement flood emergency action plans. She will discuss what emergency action planning for reclamation districts looks like.

Tiffany Cacho, San Joaquin County Office of Emergency Services

Tiffany Cacho works as the Director of Emergency Operations for San Joaquin County OES and will discuss the importance and role of emergency action plans at the county level.

Emily Pappalardo, Tule Consulting

Emily Pappalardo, owner of Tule Engineering Inc., will discuss her efforts to teach volunteers how to patrol levees, manage boils (water seeping through a levee), fill and tie sandbags, and other hands-on flood preparedness techniques.

Fiscal Information

Not applicable.

List of Attachments

Attachment 1: Delta Stewardship Council Fact Sheet (Available here: https://deltacouncil.ca.gov/pdf/about/2022-11-22-about-the-council-and-the-delta-plan.pdf)

Attachment 2: Map of Levees and Islands

Contact

Hannah Chaney

Environmental Scientist

Phone: (916) 902-6480

A recording of the presentation will be available on the Delta Council's YouTube page at https://www.youtube.com/@DeltaCouncil.