

Delta Levees 101

Information Sheet



**Delta
Stewardship
Council**

A CALIFORNIA STATE AGENCY

Did you know?

- **Levees are vital** to furthering the coequal goals of water supply reliability and ecosystem health while protecting California's Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta as an evolving place.
- **Levees reduce flood-related risks** to people, property, and state interests in the Delta.
- With climate change, it's important that these levees be **maintained and improved**.

Why levees matter

Delta levees—1,100 miles of them—protect approximately 740,000 acres of land, providing multiple benefits, including protecting public health and safety, property, water supply reliability, ecosystem health, and the Delta's unique values.

Levees' main purpose is to prevent flooding; however, they also provide value to local communities and the state.

- **Fish and Wildlife:** vegetation on levees and berms can provide habitat for birds and shade to cool the water for fish
- **Agriculture:** levees protect farms, enable drainage, and incorporate irrigation and water control facilities
- **State Infrastructure:** protection of public highways, roads, utility lines and conduits, and public facilities

Management and maintenance

Levee maintenance in the Delta is provided by state agencies, local governments, and private levee owners (collectively LMAs). However, while LMAs provide maintenance for levees, the state provides financial assistance for the planning and improvement of both project and non-project levees in the Delta. In addition, the Central Valley Flood Protection Board (CVFPB) provides reimbursement for qualifying maintenance activities for the maintenance and rehabilitation of non-project Delta levees. Local agencies are required to enter into agreements with the CVFPB to perform the maintenance and improvement work specified in local plans to access this assistance.

Glossary

Project levee: Levees owned by the federal government, for which the state has given assurances to operate and maintain in accordance with the structures' Operations and Maintenance Manual.

Non-project levee: Local flood control levees in the Delta that are not a project facility. Most of these non-project levees are maintained by local reclamation districts created and funded by landowners.



Funding

Funding for levees comes from three sources: local, state, and federal. The state has several programs to assist with improvements, operations, and maintenance through key DWR programs. Two funding programs specific to the Delta are:

1

The **Delta Levees Maintenance Subventions Program (Subventions Program)** is a cost-share program that provides technical and financial assistance to about 70 LMAs eligible for project and non-project levees that are active participants in the Subventions Program. Local agencies are responsible for the first \$1,000-\$2,500 per levee mile, based on whether the levee is rural or urban. The program reimburses up to 75% of eligible costs. The Subventions Program has special criteria to remain active, such as a "no net habitat loss" requirement and the preparation of 5-year plans that the levee-maintaining agency must submit to the DWR. Reimbursement is dependent on available funds.

2

The **Delta Levees Special Flood Control Projects Program** is a grant program utilized by LMAs in the legal Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and parts of Suisun Marsh for levee maintenance and improvement, as well as habitat mitigation and enhancement.

Since the Subventions Program began in 1973 followed by the Delta Levees Special Flood Control Projects Program in 1988, DWR has provided \$800 million in grants to aid local levee-maintaining agencies through these programs.

The federal government also plays a role in levee improvements and funding under disaster recovery programs, which provide funds to support levee reconstruction on a cost-share basis.

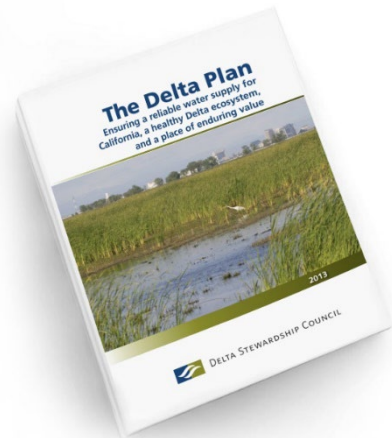
- **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Rehabilitation and Inspection Program (RIP)** is a program under which local maintaining agencies active in the RIP Program are eligible for USACE funding for levee rehabilitation and island restoration after flooding, provided that benefits exceed costs.
- **The Federal Emergency Management Agency Hazard Mitigation Grant Program** provides funding to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments to develop hazard mitigation plans and rebuild in ways that account for future disaster losses in the communities.

Levees and the Delta Plan

The Delta Plan is a comprehensive, long-term, legally enforceable plan to guide how multiple federal, State, and local agencies manage the Delta to achieve the coequal goals. The Delta Reform Act requires that the Delta Plan promote effective emergency response and preparedness, appropriate land uses, and strategic investments in levees. (Wat. Code, § 85305.) **The Delta Plan states that**

reducing flood risks to people, property, and state interests is critical to achieving the Delta

Reform Act's coequal goals and protecting the Delta as a place. Chapter 7 of the Delta Plan is dedicated to risk reduction through investments in structural and nonstructural risk reduction measures, such as targeted levee investments and promoting effective emergency preparedness.



The Delta Levees Investment Strategy (DLIS)

Given the importance of levee maintenance in the Delta, the Council enacted a regulation implementing the DLIS, a risk-based prioritization strategy for Delta levees with the goal of maximizing flood protection for people, property, and state interests. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 23, § 5012.) Through DLIS, Delta levees are assigned a priority of *Very-High, High, or Other*. DLIS directs the DWR to fund projects based on priority; accordingly, the DWR prepares an annual report for the Council. More information about DLIS can be found on the Council's website, deltacouncil.ca.gov/DLIS.

Levees and Climate Change

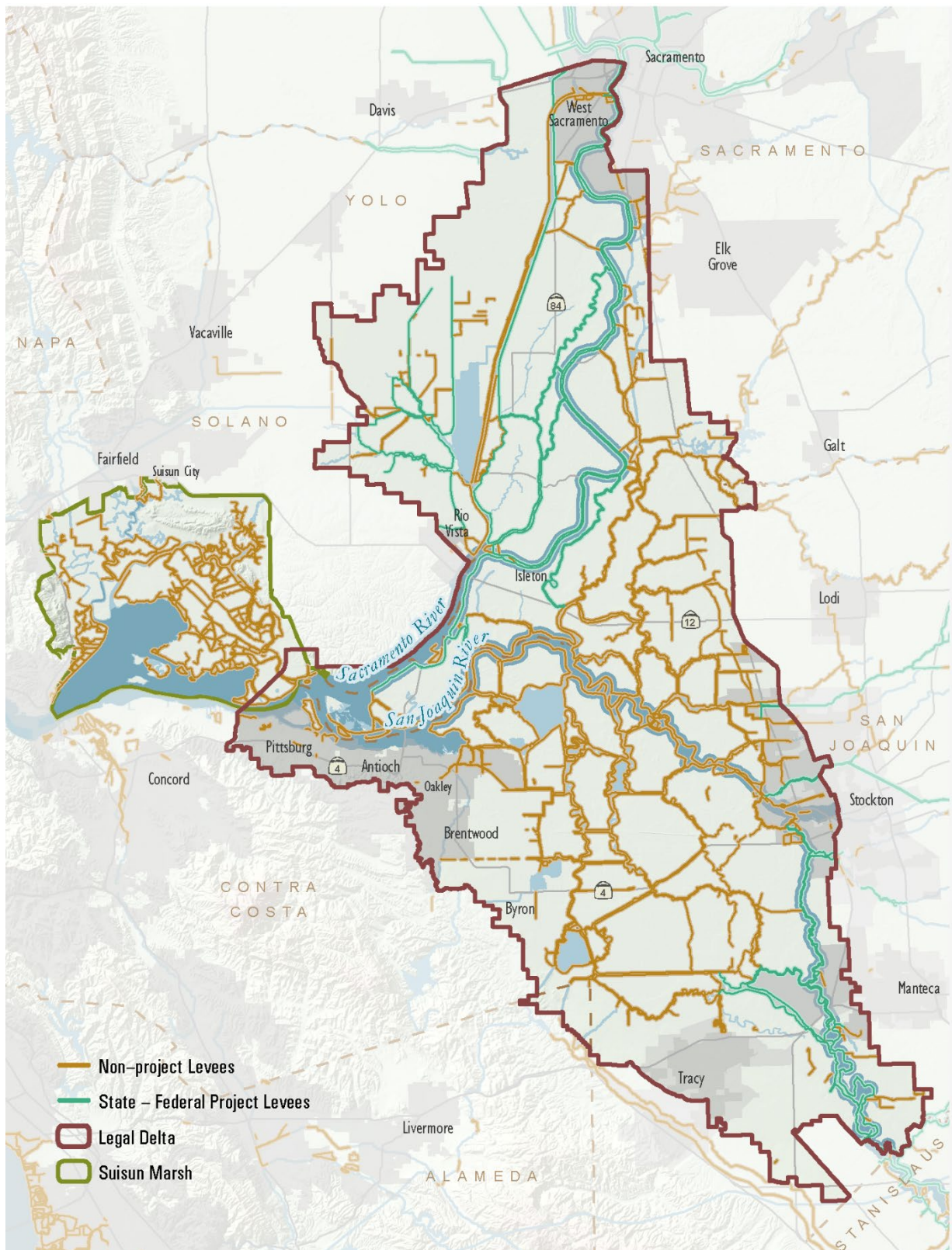
The Council's 2021 Vulnerability Assessment found that flood risk is one of the most pressing threats to the Delta and will continue to worsen in the future with changes in sea levels, precipitation, hydrology, and temperatures. More information about the Delta Adapts Vulnerability Assessment can be found on the Council's website at <https://deltacouncil.ca.gov/pdf/delta-plan/2021-06-25-delta-adapts-vulnerability-assessment.pdf>.

More Information

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Map showing state and federal project levees and non-project levees in the legal Delta and Suisun Marsh. (Delta Plan Chapter 7 - Reduce Risk to People, Property, and State Interests in the Delta)