Reading File

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION IX
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April 3, 2009

Ms. Elizabeth Holland
Planning Division
Sacramento District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
1325 J Street
Sacramento, California 95814-2922

Subject: Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Natomas Levee Improvement Program, Phase 3 Landside Improvements Project (CEQ# 20090040)

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the above-referenced document pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and our NEPA review authority under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

EPA previously reviewed the DEIS and Final EIS (FEIS) for 408 Permission and 404 Permit to Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency (SAFCA) for the Phase 2 Landside Improvements Project and programmatic evaluation of the entire Natomas Levee Improvement Program (NLIP). We provided comments to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) on August 4, 2008 and December 11, 2008, expressing concerns because of our inability to determine whether or not the preferred alternative represents the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA). We also expressed concern with the residual flood risk to development in a floodplain protected by levees, and the indirect and cumulative environmental effects of planned development facilitated by this levee project.

We continue to have concerns regarding the residual flood risk and the potential indirect and cumulative impacts of future development. We recommend implementation of the Natomas Basin flood safety plan (pps. 2-40 to 2-41) as soon as possible and prior to approval of additional development, so that new development does not compromise the flood-damage-and-risk-reduction achievements of this project.

While we commend efforts to avoid and fully compensate for the loss of riparian woodland, Giant garter snake habitat, wetlands, and Swainson's hawk habitat; we continue to have concerns with 371.48 acres of temporary effects and 36.75 acres of permanent effects on waters of the United States (US) for all four phases of the Natomas Levee Improvement Program (2008 – 2010) (p. ES-12, Phase 2 FEIS, November 2008). We recommend continued close consultation and collaboration with the U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Game, The Natomas Basin Conservancy, SAFCA, and Sacramento Area Council of Governments to ensure effects on woodlands, threatened and sensitive species habitat, and waters of the US are avoided and minimized.

Phases 1 to 4 of the Natomas Landside Improvement Project constitute an "early implementation project" to improve Natomas Basin perimeter levees to meet the 100-year flood protection design criteria adopted by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The remaining segments of the perimeter levee system would be improved by the Corps to provide flood protection that would meet California standards for the "200-year" flood stage surface water elevation. The Corps plans to seek Congressional authorization for this additional work based on a General Re-evaluation Report for the American River Common Features Project to be presented to Congress in 2010 (p. ES-3). As a reasonably foreseeable future action, the Corps' proposed "200-year" levee improvement project should be included in the evaluation of cumulative effects in the FEIS for the NLIP Phase 3 Landside Improvements Project.

Based on the above concerns, we have rated this DEIS as Environmental Concerns – Insufficient Information (EC-2) (see enclosed "*Summary of Rating Definitions*"). We appreciate the opportunity to review this DEIS. When the FEIS is released for public review, please send one hard copy and a CD ROM to the address above (mail code: CED-2). If you have any questions, please contact me at (415) 972-3521, or contact Laura Fujii, the lead reviewer for this project. Laura can be reached at (415) 972-3852 or fujii.laura@epa.gov.

Sincerely,

Kathleen M. Goforth, Manager
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Communities and Ecosystems Division

Enclosures: Summary of Rating Definitions

cc: Ken Sanchez, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Robert Solecki, Central Valley RWQCB
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