

Les Harder:

Thank you. Good morning all of you; it's quite an impressive turnout, obviously a lot of concerns about this issue. So, on behalf of the state of California, I'd like to welcome you. This is a very important symposium to us. We at the Department of Water Resources and the State Reclamation Board view this levee vegetation policy and issues associated with it as extremely important, and of course we have various concerns about the implementation of this policy. We really want to thank the Sacramento area Flood Control Agency for organizing this and setting this up. We are happy to co-sponsor it and we are very appreciative of the Corps co-sponsoring as well.

In the interest of time I'm going to try to be brief, but I would like to leave you with a basic theme for you to think about during these next two days, and then touch on three thoughts associated with that theme. The theme is this: we are all concerned about public safety, and that's going to be our primary focus; our highest priority. But we have very limited resources, and associated with the fact that we have limited resources, these are the three thoughts I'd like to leave you with. First of all, the Corps' approach currently uses risk and uncertainty, and this is based on the premise that we do have limited resources and we cannot do everything, and we have to apply them to the most critical areas first.

Now, I don't think any one of us in this room would disagree that we need to have a levee vegetation management policy, and that we have to focus on safety elements. But we need to be careful that we do not unnecessarily spend our very limited resources in areas that do not significantly reduce risk. These resources must be carefully conserved and applied to the most critical things that affect public safety.

Second, with regard to limited resources, our levees are founded on and commingled with natural levee systems and the habitat that's currently on them and the habitat that was left there when the projects were completed by the Corps. This habitat, the vegetation and the trees, are the last

remnants of the Great Riparian forests in the Central Valley. Now, there's less than about 5 percent of that left, and they provide critical habitat to numerous endangered species, and it will not be acceptable to resource agencies, environmental stakeholders, or the general public to simply eliminate all that habitat and have basically all the impacts to the endangered species.

In addition, related to that is that one of the lessons from Katrina was that degradation of environmental systems -- the wetlands and the barrier island -- actually aggravated the flood surge and the flooding that resulted and the loss of life that resulted. So, here, there may be several benefits to the habitat, particularly on the water side, that we don't fully understand yet -- such things as erosion protection in an area that we have pervasive erosion problems. We should not necessarily eliminate that without fully understanding what we're doing.

And finally, the third thought I would leave you with related to limited resources is we cannot afford to do this without being collaborative; we have to work together with our main goal of protecting the public. Now, historically the state has had just an extraordinarily excellent relationship with the Corps, particularly here with the Sacramento district, and we're looking forward to continuing that relationship and being collaborative. We were greatly encouraged when we talked with General Reilly and he agreed to co-sponsor this very important symposium, and last month when General Van Antwerp was out here and he agreed to pursue a flexible policy that would leave some of the vegetation in place.

So, with all of that, thank you all here for coming, coming here to listen, to learn, and to work collaboratively to solve this issue. Thank you very much.