

Steve Stockton:

I don't know about you all, but when I told people I was coming to the Levee Vegetation Symposium, they went, "What?" Sounds pretty exciting. Good morning, everybody. I would like to thank the Department of Water Resources, SAFCA, and Reclamation Board for their leadership in bringing the symposium together.

What I'd like to do this morning, no slides, which will allow me to stay on schedule, I'd like to provide a little context for today's discussion. Katrina was a wake-up call for the nation, the Corps, and other agencies involved in flood risk management. After Katrina, we performed extensive engineering and decision-making forensics to determine what factors led to the tragedy in New Orleans. Key findings of these forensics: the system. It was a system in name only; we need better system-wide risk-based planning and design methodologies. Changes. We need to consider changes in the hazard, the system, and the consequences over time. Lifecycle. We must better consider lifecycle performance of systems; we need to incorporate concepts such as resiliency, redundancy, and adaptive management to accommodate change -- both expected change and unexpected change. Policy and practice. We must enhance technical competence and evolve guidance and methods to integrate new technology and knowledge. That's the reason we're here today at this conference.

In response to these findings, we developed an action plan to institutionalize changes that we needed to focus more energy on. Here are these key actions. We need to employ integrated, comprehensive system approach; we need to employ risk-based concepts in planning, design, construction, operation and maintenance of Flood Damage Reduction projects. We need to continuously reassess and update our policy, employ dynamic independent review of our policies, employ adaptive planning, focus on sustainability over time - not just good enough - to build something, and not just expect it's going to stay that way forever. We need to review and inspect completed works more thoroughly and

rigorously. We need to assess and modify our organizational behavior, effectively communicate risks to all stakeholders, establish public involvement risk reduction strategies, manage and enhance technical expertise, and invest in research and development.

Bottom line to all this: the Corps and our partners must be diligent in exercising our shared responsibilities in reducing flood risk to the public. Public safety is paramount and will remain as the primary focus of our efforts. However, we understand the sensitivity of environmental concerns and other issues of concern in California, and we'll seek to develop sustainable and compatible solutions. Public safety can be compatible with environmental concerns; we are committed to making this happen.

The Corps of Engineer's goals go beyond seeking compatible solutions to vegetation management. Our broader goals and our focus is to, (1) have a safe and informed public that's empowered to take responsibility and a role in their own public safety, (2) establish and administer clear national policy and standards, not just for operation and maintenance of levees but in all areas of flood risk management, (3) have sustainable flood risk management systems that support public safety in a robust manner and provide a healthy environment. This symposium and round table activities are California-centric. That said, our goals are to share factual engineering and scientific engineering, identify substantive information gaps, and identify areas of commonality; listen, learn, and understand other stakeholders' perspectives.

We're seeking to move forward in a collaborative manner to develop mutually agreeable solutions without compromising public safety or environmental values. The Corps existing regulations provide for the allowance of vegetation and small trees on levees and are consistent with our flood risk management environmental missions and responsibility. Trees can exist, providing they do not prevent the proper functioning and

operation of the levee system. Dave Pezza will go into more detail on this during his presentation.

One last thing I would like to remind everybody: it's not just about the vegetation. Levees are one component of a flood management system which can be composed of levees, pump stations, flood walls, dams, channels, and numerous other components. Each of these components must be properly designed, built, operated, and maintained and work together as a single system in order to reduce risks to the public. Trees may be the subject of the symposium; however, it's important to not lose focus or divert attention away from the fundamental mission of the flood management agencies, which is to ensure that the system as a whole is reducing the flood risks to the communities living and working behind the system.