

Keith Swanson:

Good morning, everybody. I want to start off and thank the authors of the white paper. Some of you might be a little bit perplexed that I would be thanking the authors if you know my personal views on the white paper and you know the state's stance on it. I don't think we have a lot of agreement on the concept of vegetation removal from our levees because of the fact that it will result in destruction of critical habitat, it doesn't appear to effectively reduce flood risk, and it diverts money from more critical issues such as underseepage, erosion, evaluating pipe penetrations through our levees, and from my own personal perspective, if I get involved in removal of vegetation from our levees I'm going to get in trouble with my wife. She's a runner and she's up on the levee every day, and if we destroy that canopy, she's not going to be real happy and so it's going to be a problem for me.

But really, the reason that I applaud the core authors is that I think the white paper stimulates discussion on how we manage our flood control projects. I think we've got huge issues, and this discussion is long overdue. And I'm excited because this forum has the players that need to work together on solving the issues. So, we have this symposium and then we have a Rec Board sponsor round table on Thursday.

During the early days of the state-federal flood control partnership in the Central Valley, life was good. There was federal money flowing into the state; first it was under the guise of navigation, and then later it was in support of legitimate flood control projects that predominately protected agriculture interests. In retrospect, though, a storm was building and moving toward land. Specifically, here in the Central Valley, levees were constructed without control of the materials that were used, without any kind of control on the compaction that was applied to the materials; levees were constructed with sub-standard cross-section. We have slopes with mature vegetation on them, that maybe a waterside slope of 1.8 to 1 - - probably areas steeper than that. The levee alignments were selected

without any consideration for foundation geology, and that's causing huge problems now as we go through FEMA recertification.

The system was designed to erode; we've all heard about that, and that was great when we had mining debris that we needed to wash through the system, but it's really an untenable situation for a lot of our reclamation districts that are financed through agricultural interests. We have areas such as the Tisdale Bypass that don't even function as designed. The only way you can get the design flow through the system is if this other bypass is empty of water, and the system doesn't work that way. When the project was turned over to us, we had mature vegetation on our levee slopes, and that was contrary to Corps policy even back in the 1950s, but that's the system we have. There are a lot of people that would argue that our system is dead from an environmental perspective because of the fact that we've constrained it so much.

From an operation and maintenance perspective, problems became even more apparent with the passage of Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act. Now, there's no doubt as to the importance and the national support for these two key pieces of legislation, but the requirements have a practical effect of restricting operation and maintenance activities. Beginning in the late 1980s, and probably just until a few years ago, should have been a time for action. But actually, I think it was a time of denial. We were all hoping that somehow our storm would stay out at sea. We've had an ineffective inspection program, and that's at the state and the federal level. The state budget cuts occurred periodically, first in the early 1990s, and then later in 2002, that timeframe, we had staff cuts, we had programs like sediment removal programs that were just completely eliminated. I think we had inadequate funding at the federal level also. Vegetation management was reduced. We stopped doing vegetation management in our channels for a number of years. In fact, Sac Bay program that was formulated to deal with this erosion program was brought to its knees due to impasses with environmental compliance

issues. And we really have not addressed our ongoing underseepage issues. And I guess the other thing is, during that time we've had continued development of our Valley, so we put more people behind these substandard levees.

The situation got worse when the courts intervened. In 2002 Areola decision, local maintaining agencies were found liable for deferred maintenance. In 2003, Paterno's decision, the state was liable for latent design deficiencies associated with the 1986 break on the Yuba River. We've had flood control project failures. First we had Jones Track, which was a local event that illustrated that delta fragility and associated risks of the State and Federal Water Project. And then Katrina garnered worldwide attention as we witnessed the catastrophic death and destruction that that storm brought on.

Now, the present time, the question is, are we in the eye of the storm or has the storm passed? If we focus on vegetation removal and only vegetation removal, I think we can expect more foul weather. Agencies aren't going to be working collaboratively together. I think you can expect that there will be lawsuits, poor public relations as the public questions the loss of important habitat and asks, are we really spending our money wisely? Is it resulting in risk reduction? I think you'll see a deterioration of agency relations. Recently, those of you that know about our interagency flood management collaborative program, it's resulted in critical erosion repairs occurring in an unprecedented timeframe. Things like our Tisdale Bypass sediment removal that's ongoing now wouldn't have happened without the cooperation that we've gotten from the Resource Agency.

I think we have a choice for an alternate reality. First of all, I think collectively we do need to agree that public safety is our first priority. Environmental compliance process must allow routine maintenance to occur, and timely repair of flood damages. In the spring after the water

recedes, if we see a problem, we need to be able to identify that and get it repaired before the next flood season. Now, having said that, we also need to address our public trust issues. Management of our flood control project must be tied to species recovery, and I think really we're going to need to look at a system redesign to develop a sustainable system, and we need to maximize habitat quality consistent with conveyance. We have a lot of our channels full of star thistle; we could do a better job of maximizing the habitat values consistent with our public safety needs.

We need a science-based approach, especially true with the vegetation issue. We need to focus on high-risk guidance. At the Levee Conference last month, George Sills said, "Y'all need to pick your risk." To me, that was one of the most profound things that I heard at the conference. And I think we need to move forward in a collaborative fashion. The challenge will be to separate critical needs from agency policy position. I guess, just in conclusion, I want to ask the group, do you think there's a solution out there? I personally think there is, and I think it's the challenge of the group to figure out what that solution is. Thank you.