

**ART ISSUE PAPER
ON THE EXTENSION OF THE LEVEE PROGRAM
TO THE SUISUN MARSH**

Statement of Issue

Some stakeholders and CALFED agencies believe that the Suisun Marsh should be included in the Levee System Integrity Program. Other stakeholders, particularly Delta landowners and Reclamation District engineers, as well as other CALFED agencies are concerned with doing so.

Background

The draft CALFED Levee Program is currently focused on the legally defined Delta. Programs such as AB-360, which will serve as one of the foundations of the Levee Program, includes 12 miles of levee within the Suisun Marsh as eligible for special-projects funding. The remainder of the Suisun Marsh, however, would not be included.

Ensuring exterior levee integrity is critical to sustaining seasonal wetland values provided by the Marsh's managed wetlands. Exterior levee integrity would limit the extent of damage to homes, club houses, roads, recreation sites, and State Water Project infrastructure. It would ensure that conversion to tidal wetlands will occur only when landowners have agreed to restore tidal action, when the areas selected are consistent with ERPP targets and the goals of the Wetlands Ecosystem Goals Process and endangered species recovery plans, and where tidal wetlands functions can be restored and sustained. Maintaining adequate water quality could also be benefited by avoiding catastrophic levee failures in the Marsh and responding quickly to those that do occur. Extending the program would provide key assurances to wetland managers in the Marsh.

There are three concerns about including the Suisun Marsh:

- 1) Expansion will result in the limited funding available to the Levee Program being diluted further and result in insufficient funding for the Delta itself. Delta stakeholders are generally opposed to any action that would diminish the available funding needed to protect the Delta's levees.
- 2) Funds will be expended unnecessarily because of future actions to restore tidal emergent wetlands and tidal perennial aquatic habitat to achieve ERPP targets. In other words, it would be an inefficient use of public funds to maintain and rehabilitate any Suisun Marsh levees, which could be torn down a few years later. Levee work could

interfere with achieving tidal wetlands restoration targets.

3) The scope of the proposed program expansion may be inadequate. If it only includes the Emergency Response portion of the program it could result in lost opportunities to make relatively minor repairs and maintenance that would avoid costly levee breaks in the future.

Options for Resolving Issue

Three options are explored below:

Option 1:

Approve extension of selected portions of the Levee Program to the Suisun Marsh and include sufficient additional funding through the CALFED Levee Program to ensure no conflict with Delta needs. The ERPP would fund any levee upgrades that are needed as a result of tidal wetlands restoration.

Option 2:

Approve extension of the Levee Program to the Suisun Marsh but include sufficient additional funding through the CALFED ERPP so that the seasonal wetlands implementation objectives and targets in the ERPP can be met.

Option 3:

Reject extension of the Levee Program to the Suisun Marsh.

Action Item

Recommend Option 1 to CALFED Management Team and Policy Group. Modified versions of the Base Level Protection Plan and Special Improvement Projects, and the Emergency Management Plan elements would be extended to the Marsh. The other components, Subsidence Control Plan and Seismic Risk Assessment would not be. The PL-99 standard would not apply to the Marsh. An alternate standard, based on the existing levee criteria for the Suisun Marsh, would be selected to ensure that Marsh wetland managers would continue to be eligible for postdisaster rehabilitation assistance. A separate funding sub-account would be established so that sufficient funding would be provided to implement this extension without diverting funds needed to support all components of the Levee Program in the Delta. In order to complete this action item a more refined description of this program component would be needed, the linear extent of levees that could be affected by this extension estimated, and a projected cost estimated.