

**DRAFT Meeting Notes**  
**March 29, 1996 Levee Issues Work Group Meeting**  
**Room 1142 of the Resources Building 0930**

Voluntary Sign-in: Curt Schmutte, Gilbert Cosio, Chris Neudeck, Dave Lawson, Anna Hegedus, Karl Winkler, Alex Hildebrand, Margit Aramburu, Steve Deverel, Ed Littrell, Bill Forsythe, Kent Nelson, Niall McCarten, Jim Martin, Stein Buer, Frank Wernette, Ralph Torres, Bruce Herbold, Michael Norris, and Steve Yaeger

Curt convened the meeting and informed everyone that the meeting was scheduled until noon upon which the group could elect to break into subgroups to discuss specific issues.

Steve Yaeger welcomed the group and noted many of the members had previously participated in the BDOC Levee and Channel Technical Advisory Committee. It was noted that it may be necessary to extend the CALFED alternatives process around 30-days into June because of extensive concern regarding the processes rapid pace. CALFED will be going to press with the next re-draft of the alternatives the following Wednesday and it was hoped it would be possible to include a draft of the Delta Long-Term Levee Protection Plan in the mailing. However, to be included in the mailing the group will have to reach a consensus about the material. Steve said the objective is to mesh levee work with habitat work and he wanted input from the workgroup on priorities. Phase 1 is planned for completion in July 1996.

Margit asked if the intent is to bring forward one scenario for levee maintenance and make it universal for CALFED. She noted that often there are varieties of ways to do levee improvements depending on the situation.

Steve said we want to see a comprehensive plan for levee issues where the "target" is the same but the level of funding may be different. Steve says we're at the conceptual level in Phase 1 and more refinements to what we prepare will come in Phase 2.

Curt explained the elements of the Delta Improvement Plan to the group. He asked the group about how far one would go in the definition of habitat creation in the plan. As an example, he discussed the possibility of rehabilitating channel islands as something that may get included in the plan although it technically provides no flood control benefits. Curt said the basic program would be the Levee Subventions Program and other things like work on channel islands would likely come under the Special Habitat Program. Also, there would be an Emergency Response Program of which Alex has been a big proponent. In addition to a Beneficial Reuse Program, a Habitat Banking Program will be created to allow the base level of levee improvements to go forward.

Alex wondered about our ability to protect the Delta by having an Emergency Response Program as opposed to using those funds to improve the levees so that a failure was not likely to occur.

Curt noted the real opportunities for habitat creation are not in the Levee Subvention Program because that program already emphasizes avoidance of habitat impacts. Rather, the opportunities lie in the Special Projects Program.

Bruce wondered if there was any danger in keeping the program separate under the plan in the event that Levee Subventions says we need a certain levee setback for one reason and Special Projects says we need a different levee setback for another reason.

Chris said that shouldn't be a problem because Levee Subventions is "system-wide" whereas Special Projects is more "site-specific".

Ed noted the biologists approach to fixing the Delta would be different from the engineers approach.

Curt then discussed the habitat map and the possibility of creating habitat corridors and also the possibility of tying into the Cosumnes Preserve. He asked the group about where levee work can be combined with waterside improvements such as on Sherman Island. Other possibilities include setback levees on Steamboat Slough or channel islands on Franks Tract that could serve to reduce wave fetch.

Niall asked about the criteria that would be used to prioritize areas and Curt noted that the western islands would likely be prioritized high as well as areas such as Steamboat Slough.

Alex noted that setback levees in the Delta work in some cases but not in others because of foundation problems. Stein said that was true and noted Tyler Island as an example.

Margit said it appeared the criteria was "fish-driven" but Curt said that wasn't the case.

Karl noted that there has to be a comprehensive understanding of relationships but not necessarily a comprehensive implementation of them. An official linkage to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is needed since it will be hard to do waterside work under SB34 with continued demands under ESA and fisheries issues. The group needs to think about how the levee corridors are going to work. Also, funding will be jeopardized if things aren't clear about how to implement the plan for projects such as waterside improvements or dredging.

Curt says that CALFED is looking for some "early successes" and we need to identify some "quick start" programs for levee improvements and habitat creation.

Frank noted that if we have a comprehensive plan, then we won't have to deal with things on a project-by-project basis which takes a lot of time. He also thought some opportunities for habitat creation were missing from the wall map.

Alex noted a big sediment load comes down the San Joaquin River and settles out resulting in broad shallow flow. The water gets hot and flood stages rise above land level more frequently. There is no dredging program on the San Joaquin River like on the Sacramento River and the consequence is that the high berms on the San

Joaquin River are knocked down by the flood flows. Alex says the only alternative is to maintain the low level channels and we need to do some dredging. There is a market for the sediment but there are environmental hurdles that make dredging hard to do.

Niall discussed the streamlining of the permit process and noted that he has worked on a streamlined basis for things like work on vernal pools. The Corps can issue a streamlined permit in some cases.

Frank had ideas for habitat creation. He believes a "terrestrial-aquatic" corridor is appropriate from Rough and Ready Island to Franks Tract and Chris thinks that would be an ideal place to protect channel islands. Bruce believes it is important to protect "migration corridors" but wanted more time to think about where to sketch it on the wall map although he noted from Steamboat Slough to Decker Island might be a possibility for shaded riverine habitat (SRA).

Alex gave examples where the habitat is totally choked out by water hyacinths near where he lives.

Bruce asked about the benefits of changing the configuration of the head of Old River and the group discussed the issue. Alex said he didn't think it had any benefits for flood control as far as changing the water surface elevation.

Niall wondered if there are ways to connect channel islands and discussed photos he had in his possession from his work in Contra Costa County.

Alex suggested habitat improvements on Middle River that would remove bamboo from Stewart Tract to Victoria Canal.

Kent noted that habitat improvements can occur by using dredge material to create shallow water habitat. An example of a place where this would be applicable is McDonald Island.

Bruce asked the group where in the Delta are there places to duplicate what is occurring in Suisun Marsh.

Gilbert said that Quimby and Hastings Islands are good examples of places where this would work.

Ed added that Kimball, Decker, and Canal Ranch are other possibilities.

Anna noted that the Subventions Program part of the plan is implementable immediately and she feels it is more valuable to define where to develop SRA under the Subventions Program as opposed to the Special Projects Program when we don't even know which CALFED alternative will be endorsed yet. As an example, Anna noted that CALFED might recommend a chain-of-lakes alternative in the same place that the group is talking about developing a habitat corridor. Anna also noted that there are no Corps guidelines that allow habitat to be created on project levees and this is something to be concerned about given the discussion about the possibility of project levees being merged with nonproject levees in the future SB34 program.

At 11:45, Curt asked the group if it was necessary to form subgroups to discuss specific issues like subsidence, habitat creation, emergency response plan, a priority list, and so on. He asked what the wish of the group was and whether the group had reached consensus on the framework, habitat, and so on.

Chris says we need to agree on numbers and Gilbert and Chris say the numbers in reports for levee improvements are too low.

Frank said that Georgiana Slough and 3-Mile Slough need to be given top priority and had them shaded on the wall map. Frank asked if bringing project levees into the plan would mean that a new element would have to be created.

Curt answered that he thought that the project levees would fit into the Subventions and Special Projects Programs and no new element would have to be created.

Karl suggested the group map out the places to do habitat improvements and then do a search of all possible funding sources such as SB34, the Corps, SB-900, etc. and then go back to CALFED to see what funding is available.

Niall suggested a subcommittee containing biologists, geomorphologists, etc, to map out habitat locations.

Curt thought that the present group could handle the task and suggested that Niall bring something back to the levee workgroup. Frank said he would like to be involved in the process at the early stages.

Curt ended the meeting without the subgroups forming and scheduled the next meeting for 4-29-96 from 9am to 11:30 in room 1142 of the Resources Building.