

DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

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November 21, 2006

Honorable Heather Fargo
Mayor of the City of Sacramento
City Hall
915 I Street, 5th Floor
Sacramento, California 95814-2604

Re: Natomas Basin Risk Reduction

Dear Mayor Fargo:

The need to improve flood protection in the Central Valley is receiving more attention at the federal, State and local levels than it has in decades. There is an unprecedented level of cooperation among these agencies in the expedited repair of critical erosion sites and in developing strategies to increase levels of protection. However, there are still many areas of the valley without adequate flood protection.

The Department of Water Resources (DWR) is charged with managing the State's responsibilities associated with flood management and is keenly interested in reducing the flood risk to life and property. To this end, DWR is in the process of providing communities throughout the Central Valley with the best available information regarding the estimated level of flood protection afforded by levees and other facilities of the flood control system. We hope that local communities will use this information to make improved land use decisions, to better inform their citizens of the level of flood risk in their areas, to encourage the purchase of flood insurance, and to improve emergency response and evacuation planning.

One such area of flood risk in the Sacramento region is the Natomas Basin. Recent letters from the US Army Corps of Engineers and DWR to Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency (SAFCA) indicate that the Natomas levee system does not meet minimum federal flood insurance program standards for 100-year flood protection. While SAFCA is diligently working to improve the Natomas flood management system, and while DWR intends to help expedite these efforts, the area is at high risk and will continue to be at high risk for several years. This is particularly troubling since Natomas is a deep basin and may experience flooding in excess of 15 feet.

DWR has already informed FEMA of this risk and the need for the Natomas Basin to be remapped. We plan to continue to work with FEMA's Region IX Office to have the basin remapped into either an AR or A99 Special Flood Hazard Zone. However, it is currently unclear when FEMA will act on DWR's request.

In the meantime, it is imperative that additional measures be taken to reduce the threat to public safety and property. Due to the low level of flood protection for this deep flood plain, we agree with your strategy that "business as usual" is not an acceptable path. With less than 100-year flood protection, the chance of homes flooding over the next 10 years is approximately 10 percent, much greater than the risk of a home fire. Accordingly, we believe that all levels of both the private and public sectors need to take specific steps to reduce flood risk and impacts.

The State of California has already agreed to fund some of the most crucial and immediate repairs in the Natomas Basin, including those at Pritchard Lake, Sacramento River Mile 68.9L, and at Sacramento River Mile 78.0L. The State also plans to fund its share of levee upgrades to the Natomas Basin so that the level of protection extends beyond the federal minimum standard, to at least a 200-year level of protection. The recent passage of Proposition 1E and Proposition 84 improves DWR's ability to assist local, regional, and federal agencies in both the levee evaluation and remapping and the levee repair/upgrade work.

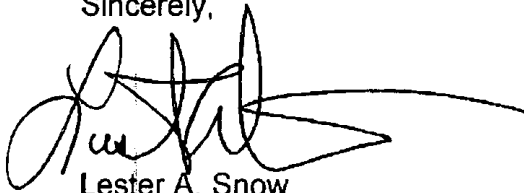
Also needed is an expanded set of local actions to respond to this urgent threat to public safety. We recognize that local governments, together with SAFCA, have done a commendable job of informing the public of flood dangers and developing emergency response plans. It is prudent to consider additional local efforts to protect the public against this higher risk including the following:

- Limitation on new construction until minimum flood protection is achieved.
- Building design requirements on any new construction related to potential depth of flooding and resident survivability.
- Special notifications of the high flood risk to:
 - First-time buyers of new homes
 - Buyers of resale property
 - New renters
- Regular (e.g. annual) notification to existing property owners and renters of the high flood risk.
- Dissemination of information regarding the National Flood Insurance Program and continuing outreach to encourage residents' purchase of flood insurance.
- Requirements that builders provide flood insurance for new residents until the minimum level of flood protection is reached.
- Robust assessment of flood risk in general plan updates, and adoption of policies and plans that are at least as effective as those described in the State General Plan Guidelines for Safety Elements.
- Increased emergency response and evacuation preparation and planning, including practice response drills.

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We know that you have already undertaken some of these actions. We look forward to hearing more details on the efforts that the City of Sacramento will be taking to deal with the high flood risk in the Natomas Basin and would be happy to meet with you to help with these issues and to develop joint efforts as appropriate. If you have any questions or wish to meet to discuss the measures that the City of Sacramento will be taking, please contact me at (916) 653-7007 or Leslie F. Harder, Jr., Deputy Director for Public Safety, at (916) 653-9502.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lester A. Snow", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lester A. Snow
Director