

# Draft flood plan includes some farmland losses

**Kate Campbell, Ag Alert, 2-1-12**

A new plan for managing flood risk in the Central Valley was unveiled last week in Sacramento. Officials said implementing the plan once it's finalized could cost between \$14 billion to \$17 billion, invested during a 20- to 25-year period.

In the process, about 40,000 acres of farmland, primarily in the Sacramento Valley, would be used to create new "flood space" or system flow capacity. The increased capacity would come from new setback levees and bypass expansions.

The draft flood plan indicates that about 10,000 acres of flood space would become permanent habitat. According to the draft plan, the remaining 30,000 acres would remain farmable, subject to flood easements and seasonal flooding, similar to farming in the existing bypasses today.

The Department of Water Resources developed the plan as required under the Central Valley Flood Protection Act of 2008, which was adopted in the wake of the Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans. The draft plan was presented to the Central Valley Flood Protection Board during a heavily attended meeting.

More than 1 million Californians live and work in the flood plains of the Central Valley where experts say the flood risks are among the highest in the nation, particularly in the Sacramento Valley. Public and private assets at risk in a flood event total more than \$70 billion, they said.

Flood protection infrastructure evaluated in the process of developing the plan includes about 1,600 miles of levees and 1,000 miles of channels, much of it built before the 1940s. About 300 miles of levees help protect urban areas, which the plan calls for upgrading to protect against a 200-year flood event, and about 1,230 miles that help protect rural areas would be strengthened to withstand a 100-year event.

Also included in the system are about 420 miles of privately owned levees that experts say are instrumental to the system's effective functioning, but are not part of the state's infrastructure responsibility.

"Because of the sweeping nature of the draft flood management plan introduced last week, we're encouraging farmers and ranchers in the Central Valley to weigh in with DWR during the run up to the final document this summer," said Justin Fredrickson, California Farm Bureau Federation environmental policy analyst.

"If implemented, the final plan could be a fundamental shift in the future of flood policy and protection, with major implications for California agriculture," he said. "Unfortunately, we have not seen these interests meaningfully included in the process to date."

Because of the implications for agriculture of the proposed plan, CFBF has added a special "Flood Issues" section to its website at [www.cfbf.com](http://www.cfbf.com). On the web page, the public can view a map of the state's proposed bypass expansions and levee setbacks. In addition, the section includes an overview of the issue, updates on plan development, key documents related to the proposal, comment letters and the opportunity to subscribe to updates on the topic.

The Central Valley Flood Protection Board will conduct public meetings on the proposed plan throughout the spring with adoption of a final plan in June. Implementation will begin once the plan is adopted, with five-year updates.

Colusa alfalfa farmer Tom Ellis, who attended the flood plan presentation in Sacramento, said, "I don't feel farmers and ranchers are going to get much from this plan. Basically, it shifts flood risks from the urban areas to agriculture."

Max Sakato, general manager of Reclamation District 1500 in Sutter County, said after the meeting: "Farmers have to get engaged in the process of finalizing this plan. At this point the maps included in the draft are a lot of lines. Our district covers 68,000 acres and a lot of it is in areas outlined for increased flood space.

"We've needed a comprehensive flood management plan for a long time," Sakato said. "This draft is a start. But there needs to be active outreach to local landowners and farmers need to be directly engaged in this process."

Not all local entities that could be impacted by the plan are happy with the process of developing it. A representative for the Yolo County Board of Supervisors said the county will not support the plan until its agencies have been included in planning discussions and the needs of its property owners are taken into consideration.

A number of residential properties and farmland are included in the proposed plans for bypass expansion in Yolo County.

Key decision points and opportunities for stakeholder comment in the process were announced by the Central Valley Flood Protection Board at its meeting on Jan. 27 and include the following:

- Feb. 24 board meeting: Board will solicit written and in-person comments on "focus points" for April 2012 public outreach meetings.
- March 23 board meeting: Expected release of DWR environmental documents, which will start the public comment period under state and federal law.
- April public outreach hearings: Expected to be held in Stockton/Modesto, Sacramento and Marysville/Yuba City.
- Early May: Public workshops and flood board discussion of responses to public comments on the draft flood plan and proposed plan changes.
- June 22 board meeting: Board to adopt final flood plan.

Beyond the state's public process, Fredrickson stressed that the state needs to hear from individuals, county Farm Bureaus, local reclamation districts and local officials.

"There is a need for much more open communication with local interests in this process—both now and in implementation once a plan is adopted," he said.

Online information on the proposed Central Valley Flood Protection Plan is available at [www.cfbf.com](http://www.cfbf.com).

Send written comments on the proposed flood plan by mail to the Central Valley Flood Protection Board, 3310 El Camino Ave., Room 151, Sacramento, CA 95821.