

Protecting Our Land

Don't Limit Flood Control Options

by Rob Vining

(NAPSA)—More than 100,000 miles of flood levees crisscross the length and breadth of the U.S., protecting cities from disaster.

They range from sophisticated systems of concrete floodwalls to simple piles of dirt. But until Hurricane Katrina struck, they tended to receive little attention. As a



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result, many of these vital flood-control walls are in a state of disrepair. Indeed, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) reported that 13,000 miles of levees in 27 states had unacceptable maintenance ratings.

Rather than dedicating the resources to bring our levees up to par, however, a new draft executive order submitted to the White House could result in their further erosion. That could lead to increased flooding, plummeting property values and the virtual freezing of economic development.

The draft order was written with good intentions, but its focus on increasing federal flood protection standards from 100-year to 500-year levels of protection—with the goal of returning to a natural state of floodplains—will significantly increase the flood risk to millions of Americans and cause a realignment of the economic engine of this country.

It calls for levees to meet new 500-year levels of protection to be considered “sufficient” under USACE and FEMA standards. The current standard calls for 100-year levels of protection, which would protect against a storm expected to hit only once every 100 years.

If cities and states cannot bring their levees up to the 500-year standard within two years, FEMA would redraw floodplain lines on the assumption that these levees “do not exist.” That means homes and businesses not considered to lie in floodplains today could be considered flood risks tomorrow. This poses major insurability concerns for businesses and residents and threatens to drastically reduce the value of millions of acres of property. It also would pull the plug on further improvements in the affected areas.

Improving standards of safety and protection is a move in the right direction. But today, only a handful of levees meet 500-year levels. With no funding in sight, how can we increase requirements on communities already struggling to reach 100-year levels?

The answer is not simply to throw money at building bigger, stronger levees, though. We must take a balanced, systematic approach to flood protection that uses all the means at our disposal. That includes restoration of floodplains as well as shoring up levees with better safeguards and promising new technologies. Only then will we strike the proper balance between flood control, protecting the environment and reviving our economy.

For more information, visit www.HNTB.com or call (972) 661-5626.

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