CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES
NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Millions of People and Billions of Property at Risk for Flooding in California

APRIL 3, 2013; SACRAMENTO, CA – Reducing California's future flood risk will require unprecedented cooperation and alignment among public agencies and a commitment to developing stable funding mechanisms, according to a draft report released today by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

California's Flood Future: Recommendations for Managing California's Flood Risk reports that $580 billion in assets are exposed to flood risk throughout the state, and 7 million Californians live in a floodplain. The report includes seven strategic recommendations intended to inform local, state, and federal decisions about flood management policies and financial investments.

"Even with a history of continuing investment and action by local, state and federal flood management agencies, many regions in California face significant exposure to flood risk," said Department of Water Resources (DWR) program manager Terri Wegener. "With millions of people, valuable farmland and major infrastructure at risk, the impact from a major flood in California would be devastating here, and to the nation."

Wegener noted that the country's major flood events in the past few years demonstrate the wisdom of planning ahead.

"It is much smarter and more cost effective to reduce flood risk now than to spend billions of dollars trying to recover from a major flood," she said.

California's Flood Future contains a comprehensive look at flooding throughout the state, along with challenges and recommendations for improving flood management. With state snowpack levels currently at low levels, the report is an important reminder about California's variable weather extremes and a caution to look at flood management from an integrated perspective.

"It's critical to have the kind of detailed understanding that California's Flood Future gives us of where the risks are greatest and how they're connected," said Kim Carsell, the Corps' lead planner for the report. "This research provides us with a level of specificity that we've never had before. For example, it shows the impacts to major areas of concern like critical facilities and agriculture, as well as the specific impacts to local communities."

Key findings from California's Flood Future include:

• California is at catastrophic risk for devastating floods.
California's diverse geography contributes to the state's significant flood risk. In many California regions, peak flows – the largest volume of water flowing per second through a water system – occur in a very short timeframe, which spells disaster.

• Flooding is a statewide problem.
Every California county has experienced a federally declared flood disaster in the past 20 years. Counties with relatively low risk for a major flood event would be impacted by the results of a catastrophic flood elsewhere in the state, when employment centers, transportation facilities, utilities and the economy are affected.

The impacts of a major flood would be devastating to California and to the nation.
In addition to tragic loss of life, flooding in California can have a serious impact on the state's economy and environmental resources. As one of the world's largest economies, a major flood in California will have an unprecedented impact on the national economy as well. With many more people and structures per square mile in California's urban areas, California would likely see much higher recovery costs from a major flood than the $110 billion that has been spent on recovery from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; or the $60 billion that has been appropriated for recovery from Superstorm Sandy.

California's Flood Future outlines seven recommendations to improve public safety, foster environmental stewardship and support economic stability:

1) Conduct regional flood risk assessments to better understand statewide flood risk.
Identifying flood risk is an important first step toward reducing risk and prioritizing flood management infrastructure needs in California; however, few detailed risk assessments have been completed.

2) Increase public and policymaker awareness about flood risks to facilitate informed decisions.
Policymakers and the public have varying levels of understanding about the risks and consequences of flooding. This can lead to decisions that put people and property at increased risk.

3) Increase support for flood emergency preparedness, response and recovery programs to reduce flood impacts.
Flood emergency programs are a cost-effective, non-structural tool to reduce flood risk.

4) Encourage land use planning practices that reduce the consequences of flooding.
Development in California has increased in areas that are at risk for flooding. Some local land use agencies experience pressure to approve developments in floodplains.

5) Implement flood management from regional, system-wide and statewide perspectives to provide multiple benefits.
Historically, flood management projects have been developed on a site-by-site basis. This approach does not consider regional solutions or California's complex regulatory, permitting and water management environment.

6) Increase collaboration among public agencies to improve flood management planning, policies and investments.
California has more than 1,300 agencies overseeing operation, maintenance and improvement of vital infrastructure facilities within agency boundaries. This complex governance situation makes agency coordination and alignment fragmented and difficult.

7) Establish sufficient and stable funding mechanisms to reduce flood risk.
The backlog of identified flood management projects is primarily due to lack of funding. Prioritizing and communicating flood management investment needs will help generate support for increased funding.

DWR and USACE will conduct a series of informational workshops throughout California to discuss the public review draft of California's Flood Future, which is now open for a 45-day public comment period.
To learn more about California's Flood Future or the informational workshops, visit www.water.ca.gov/SFMP

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The Department of Water Resources operates and maintains the State Water Project, provides dam safety and flood control and inspection services, assists local water districts in water management and water conservation planning, and plans for future statewide water needs.