

Our Nation's Dams and Levees are in Critical Need of Attention

Dams and Levees - essential infrastructure protecting lives and property, providing storage for water supply, producing energy, and offering an array of environmental and economic benefits - are in critical need of attention.

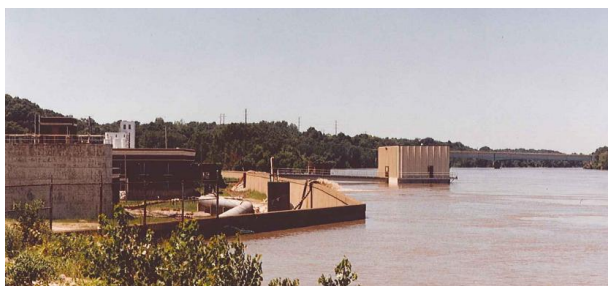
Role of dams and levees: Reliable dams and levees are necessary for public safety, providing flood control and protection for people and property throughout the nation. They are an important part of our energy framework with dams generating hydroelectric power and levees protecting many power plant facilities. Their support of our economy is extensive, represented in part by the oil, gas and petrochemical industries along the Texas and Louisiana Gulf coast and the agribusiness economy throughout California's Central Valley and the Midwest. They are critical to the viability of our overall public infrastructure network, protecting other infrastructure including railroads, roads, and water and wastewater treatment facilities.

Rewards from dams and levees: Dams and their respective hydropower facilities built and maintained by the Corps of Engineers produce nearly a third of the nation's total hydropower output; powering nearly 10 million households. While representing only a fraction of dams in the U.S., those 693 dams operated by the Corps in 43 states protect \$235 billion in property. Additionally, levees protect millions of homeowners, hundreds of thousands of workers and manufacturing jobs in some of our strongest remaining industrial zones. Nearly half of Americans live in counties with levees or related flood protection infrastructure.



Hoover Dam on the Colorado River

Risks with dams and levees: There is a growing recognition that dam and levee infrastructure throughout the nation is in need of more attention as many projects have exceeded their design life. Simply maintaining these facilities and expecting them to perform as initially intended is no longer reasonable. The Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO) estimated in 2009 that needed repairs for dams in the U.S would cost \$16 billion.



Fairfax floodwall along west bank of the Missouri River during 1993 floods, at the site of the BPU municipal water and power plants, protecting a \$3.5 billion industrial park and over 8,000 manufacturing and industrial related jobs.

In addition to missing out on project benefits, loss of life is a real risk with infrastructure that allows for water storage and supply, and that also provides flood protection. Some of nation's most productive regions are in levee protected areas along rivers and coastlines, and millions of people continue to live and work in areas behind levees and downstream of dams. ASDSO reports that there are approximately 13,000 high-hazard dams (those whose failure would result in loss of human life) in the U.S.

Consideration should be given to modifying existing processes, implementing new programs and continuing investment in dams and levees so that we achieve ongoing benefits, reliability of systems, and resiliency in our communities.

Modify levee accreditation process presently being implemented by FEMA to:

- allow more time to address concerns, particularly in the absence of federal funding for Corps-designed and built levees, and develop comprehensive approaches to address deficiencies - including such possible solutions as setback levees, and coupling of levee modifications with other improvements such as habitat restoration or improved ingress and egress;
- move forward with a better understanding of the burdens placed on communities when large tracts of developed land are designated as essentially not having any level of flood protection, simply because FEMA does not accredit that land as having 100-year protection; and,
- extend time to achieve accreditation for communities with active plans to manage risks associated with levees, both in the interim until a more permanent solution can be achieved as well as the residual risk that will remain after the planned improvements are made.

Implement a national levee safety program

that supports local and state efforts to manage flood risk. Levees across the nation are central and necessary tools in flood risk management, reducing the effects of floods on people, property, critical infrastructure, and the environment. However, risks of loss of life, property damage, and damage to cultural and natural resources behind levees continue to increase.

Reconstruct and recapitalize dams and levees to receive current and future benefits of water storage for supply, hydropower generation, flood risk reduction, and environmental protection.

Reinvestment in our nation's dam and levee infrastructure will help stem the growth of risks and reduce the likelihood of another devastating failure, and without this reinvestment the benefits we rely on will continue to degrade.



Yazoo Levee, Mississippi



The National Waterways Conference, established in 1960, is dedicated to a greater understanding of the widespread public benefits of our nation's water resources infrastructure. Our mission is to effect common sense policies and programs, recognizing the public value of our Nation's water resources and their contribution to public safety, a competitive economy, national security, environmental quality and energy conservation. Conference membership is comprised of the full spectrum of water resources stakeholders, including flood control associations, levee boards, waterways shippers and carriers, industry and regional associations, port authorities, shipyards, dredging contractors, regional water districts, engineering consultants, and state and local governments. www.waterways.org