

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION CHECKLIST

Delta Cross Channel Phase II Vegetation Removal

(North Levee and Snodgrass Levees)

South-Central California Area Office

March 27, 2012

Background: The Delta Cross Channel (DCC), located in Walnut Grove, California, is a feature of the Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) Central Valley Project Delta Division. The DCC is a controlled diversion channel between the Sacramento River and Snodgrass Slough. Water is diverted from the river into the slough through a short excavated channel near the City of Walnut Grove in Sacramento County, California (Figure 1). The DCC levees and Snodgrass Slough levees provide flood protection for the City of Walnut Grove and adjacent areas. Over time, vegetation has overgrown the water-side and land-side of the South Levee, North Levee, and Snodgrass Slough Levee preventing inspection of the levees (see Figure 2).

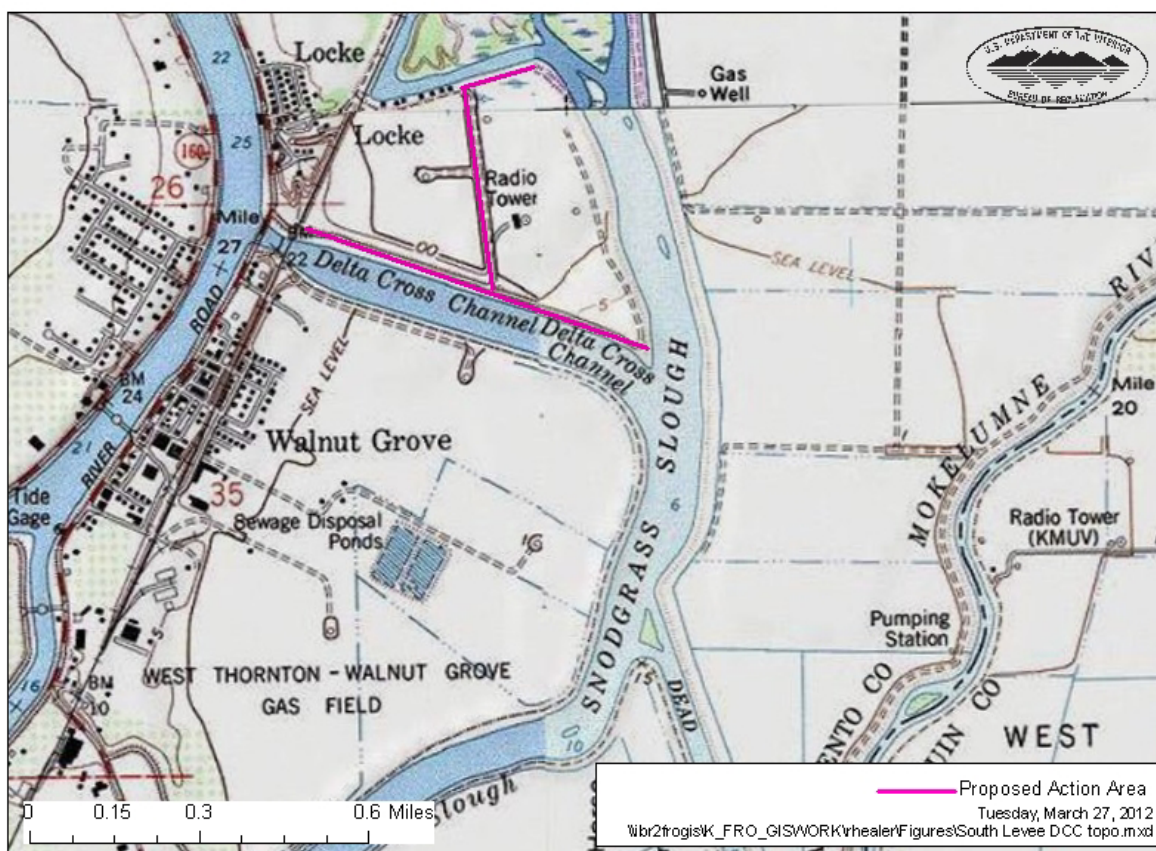


Figure 1. Proposed Action Location

Due to structural integrity concerns and the nearness of Walnut Grove to the South Levee, Reclamation prepared a separate environmental analysis for vegetation clearing of the South Levee under a Categorical Exclusion Checklist (CEC) entitled *Delta Cross Channel South Levee Vegetation Removal* (CEC-11-045). CEC-11-045 was approved on July 19, 2011 and Reclamation completed partial vegetation clearing of the South Levee in December of 2011.



Figure 2. Proposed Action Details (extent of action area is approximate)

Purpose and Need for Action: Reclamation needs to be able to inspect the North Levee and Snodgrass Slough levee in order to determine structural integrity of the levees and to determine what future work needs to be done to the levees. The purpose of the Proposed Action is to perform partial clearing of vegetation and access road repair along the North Levee and Snodgrass Slough Levee in order to allow inspection of the levees.

Proposed Action: Reclamation proposes to remove vegetation and trash along the North Levee and the northern portion of Snodgrass Slough Levee (Figure 2). Staging would occur on the access roads of the levees and the new turnaround area once it is created. No vegetation would be removed within 10 feet of the ordinary high water mark. Reclamation also proposes to repair the access roads to the levees. Vegetation would be removed by mowing or cutting and disposed offsite. Vegetation removal and road repair would be subject to the following conditions:

Vegetation Removal on the Water-side of the North Levee:

- Isolated trees between the crest of the levee and 20 feet below the crest would be removed if they are less than 4-inches in diameter at 4-feet above the ground surface. No trees would be removed below 20 feet from the crest (measured from the start of the side slope down toward the water). No trees greater than 4-inches in diameter at 4 feet above the ground surface would be removed.

- Trees located between the crest of the levee and 20 feet below the crest would be limbed up to 6-feet above the ground surface in all directions.
- Trees below 20 feet from the crest of the levee would be limbed up to 6-feet above the ground surface only on the landward/upslope side of the tree (side closest to the levee and away from the water).
- Herbaceous vegetation and shrubs (i.e., fennel, blackberries, roses, etc.) would be removed from the crest of the levee down to within 10 feet of the ordinary high water mark if they are less than 8-feet tall. Grape vines up to a 15 foot height would also be removed.
- No elderberry bushes, or other vegetation located within 100 feet from elderberry bushes, would be removed.
- All trees and vegetation would be cut 6 inches above the ground and no roots would be removed.

Vegetation Removal on the Land-side of the North Levee:

- Trees and vegetation would be removed for a distance of 50 feet from the north edge of the North levee access road or until the edge of the top of the levee, whichever distance is closer.
- No elderberry bushes, or other vegetation located within 100 feet from elderberry bushes, would be removed.
- All trees and vegetation would be cut 6 inches above the ground and no roots would be removed.

Vegetation Removal on Snodgrass Slough:

- Vegetation removal would begin at STA 30+50 and continue west to the Reclamation property boundary. No vegetation removal would occur on Snodgrass Slough between STA 0+00 to STA30+50.
- No vegetation will be removed on the water side of Snodgrass slough levee.
- No elderberry bushes, or other vegetation located within 100 feet from elderberry bushes, would be removed.
- Herbaceous vegetation and shrubs (i.e., fennel, blackberries, roses, etc.) would be removed from the crest of the levee down to 15 feet outside from the toe of the levee on the landside if they are less than 8-feet tall.
- Trees located on the landside between the crest of the levee and 15 feet below the outside levee toe could be removed as long as limbs are below a plane that lays parallel and level with the crest of the levee. No limbs extending above this plane may be removed. All trees and vegetation would be cut 6 inches above the ground and no roots would be removed.

Access Road Improvements:

- The 12-foot wide North Levee access road would be repaired beginning at the second vehicle gate and continue approximately 1,500 feet towards Snodgrass Levee. Repairs would consist of ripping in place the existing access road and reshaping and recompacting the road surface. The surface would be reshaped to allow runoff to drain towards the landward side of the levee and the access road would be covered with a 4-inch layer of aggregate road base.

- Ruts surrounding the second gate and along the North Levee access road shoulder would be repaired.
- A turnaround area would be created approximately 1,500 feet beyond the second vehicle gate. This area would intersect the North Levee access road and the unimproved Snodgrass Slough Levee access road with a 40-foot radius curve that would connect both access roads. A parking area would be constructed by essentially widening the curve 25-feet from the center line of the turnaround. The parking area would be a minimum of 1,100 square feet. The turnaround and parking areas would be cleared and grubbed of vegetation. The ground surface would then to be ripped, regraded, and recompact to restore a uniform ground surface that facilitates adequate surface drainage and a 4-inch layer of aggregate road base placed on top.
- The 9-foot wide retention dike access road would be repaired in the same manner as the North Levee access road. The road would be crowned along its centerline and sloped to allow drainage on both sides of the access road.

In addition, when the following measures are included as part of the Proposed Action and implemented, effects to listed species and designated critical habitat would be avoided.

Measures to be implemented include:

- All workers on site would be required to attend an orientation on listed species that would be provided by a Reclamation biologist (covering topics such as protection status of listed species, their identification, habitat requirements and natural history).
- Elderberry shrubs are potential hosts for threatened Valley elderberry longhorn beetle (VELB). Elderberry shrubs would not be disturbed and no vegetation within 100 feet of these shrubs would be removed. Reclamation biologists will demarcate zones around elderberry shrubs where vegetation would not be disturbed. Furthermore, since elderberry shrubs occur near the roadway on Snodgrass Slough levee, if work is to be done between February 1 through June 30, access to work areas on the north end of the Snodgrass Slough Levee would only be through the retention dike access road that connects the north end of Snodgrass Slough Levee and the North Levee of the DCC.
- Vegetation up to 10 feet from the ordinary high water mark would not be disturbed. Vegetation providing shading to waterways or that could contribute to woody input to waterways would not be removed. Heavy equipment is not permitted to work on levees, thereby protecting against soil erosion to waterways. Additionally, no work would occur in waterways.
- If ground disturbance for roadwork would be required between October 1 and May 1, areas to be disturbed would first be surveyed and potential Giant garter snake (GGS) overwintering sites would be avoided.
- Contact information for the person in charge of work at the site (including telephone number, cell telephone, and e-mail) shall be provided to Reclamation environmental staff. If a GGS is observed at the project site, work would be stopped, Reclamation biologists would be notified, and work would not resume until appropriate consultation was completed and authorized by Reclamation.

Exclusion Category: 516 DM 14.5 C (3). Minor construction activities associated with authorized projects which correct unsatisfactory environmental conditions or which merely augment or supplement, or are enclosed within existing facilities.

Evaluation of Criteria for Categorical Exclusion

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| 1. This action would have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. | No <u>X</u> | Uncertain ____ | Yes |
| 2. This action would have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources. | No <u>X</u> | Uncertain ____ | Yes |

Evaluation of Exemptions to Actions within Categorical Exclusion

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|--|-------------|----------------|-----|
| 1. This action would have significant adverse effects on public health or safety. | No <u>X</u> | Uncertain ____ | Yes |
| 2. This action would have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographical characteristics as historic or cultural resources; parks, recreation, and refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands; floodplains; national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas. | No <u>X</u> | Uncertain ____ | Yes |
| 3. This action would have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks. | No <u>X</u> | Uncertain ____ | Yes |
| 4. This action would establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects. | No <u>X</u> | Uncertain ____ | Yes |

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| 5. This action would have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects. | No <u> X </u> | Uncertain <u> </u> | Yes |
| 6. This action would have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by the bureau (in coordination with a Reclamation cultural resources professional). | No <u> X </u> | Uncertain <u> </u> | Yes |
| 7. This action would have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated critical habitat for these species. | No <u> X </u> | Uncertain <u> </u> | Yes |
| 8. This action would violate a Federal, State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for protection of the environment. | No <u> X </u> | Uncertain <u> </u> | Yes |
| 9. This action would affect Indian Trust Assets (ITA) (To be completed by Reclamation official responsible for ITA). | No <u> X </u> | Uncertain <u> </u> | Yes |
| 10. This action would have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations. | No <u> X </u> | Uncertain <u> </u> | Yes |
| 11. This action would limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites. | No <u> X </u> | Uncertain <u> </u> | Yes |

12. This action would contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species. No X Uncertain ____ Yes

NEPA Action: Categorical Exclusion X

Environmental commitments, explanation, and/or remarks:

- ☒ Yes ☐ No Environmental commitments are required and attached.
- ☐ San Joaquin Kit Fox Avoidance and Minimization Measures
 - ☐ Giant Garter Snake Avoidance and Minimization Measures
 - ☐ California Tiger Salamander Avoidance and Minimization Measures
 - ☐ California Red-Legged Frog Avoidance and Minimization Measures
 - ☒ Other: Commitments are written into the Proposed Action above.

Prepared by:

Date: 3/30/2012

South-Central California Area Office

Regional Archeologist concurred with Item 6. Their determination has been placed within the project file.

Area Office Biologist concurred with Item 7. Their determination has been placed within the project file.

ITA Designee concurred with Item 9. Their determination has been placed within the project file.

Concur:

Date: 03/30/2012

Wildlife Biologist, South-Central California Area Office

Concur:

Date: 4/2/12

Supervisory Natural Resources Specialist, South-Central California Area Office

Approved:

Date: 4/2/12

Chief, Resources Management Division, South-Central California Area Office