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Congresswoman Matsui Introduces Vegetation on Levees Legislation

Bipartisan legislation, cosponsored by 26 Members of the CA Delegation, would require regional variances to ensure flexibility of national policy

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Congresswoman Doris Matsui (CA-06) introduced the Levee Vegetation Review Act, bipartisan legislation that would require the Army Corps of Engineers to thoroughly review and reconsider their current position regarding vegetation on levees. The legislation is cosponsored by 26 Members of the California Delegation and would require the Corps to move to regional variances with input from the state and local entities rather than their current “one-size-fits-all” national standard.

“Levees are our first line of defense, so we need to use the best science to make them as reliable as possible. It is imperative that we find the right balance between ensuring we have strong and safe levees, and prudent fiscal and environmental concerns,” said Congresswoman Matsui. “The Corps’ current vegetation policy does not provide enough flexibility for the unique challenges of different regions across the nation, and particularly in California and communities like the Sacramento region. This legislation would require the Corps to move to regional variances, ensuring limited financial resources can be used where they are most needed – building and repairing our levees.”

“While they have the best of intentions, the Army Corps's ‘one-chainsaw-fits-all’ policy on levee vegetation would move us in the wrong direction, threatening levee stability, lawsuits, and environmental degradation,” said Congressman John Garamendi (CA-03), a Member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. “The Levee Vegetation Review Act allows us to reassess the situation, employ scientific data, and empower the Sacramento region to

work with the Army Corps on the best policy for our community. The Levee Vegetation Review Act would set us on the right path.”

“Our levees in the Natomas area are vulnerable and in dire need of upgrades. In a time of diminishing public resources, any levee-related funding should be spent first on these crucial levee fixes that will keep Sacramento area residents safe,” said Congressman Ami Bera (CA-07). “As a former board member of the Sacramento Tree Foundation, I also know that our trees make the community healthier, more beautiful and more livable. I am proud to work with Congresswoman Matsui to address this critical issue affecting our districts and commend her on her leadership on the levees.”

The Army Corps of Engineers released a Policy Guidance Letter for regional variance, however it did not take into account the concerns that have been voiced by the State of California and a wide range of stakeholders, nor did it provide the flexibility needed to consider the unique challenges facing various regions. The Levee Vegetation Review Act would address this by requiring the Corps to move to regional variances with input from state and local entities. As part of the regional variance policy, this bill would provide the Corps with the flexibility to exempt areas from the vegetation on levee policy, where deemed necessary by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Congresswoman Matsui has been a leader in Congress advocating for the Corps to revise its vegetation on levees policy. She was the first Member to raise concerns about the Corps policy. She has continued to voice concerns in meetings with Assistant Secretary of the Army Jo-Ellen Darcy, and by spearheading legislation and California Delegation letters to the Corps last Congress. She continues to urge the Corps to restore balance to decisions involving levees and vegetation, and end the uncertainty that has plagued state and local flood protection agencies over the last year.

Original co-sponsors (26) of the bill are Representatives: Doris Matsui (CA-06), John Garamendi (CA-03), George Miller (CA-11), Gary Miller (CA-31), Mike Thompson (CA-05), Zoe Lofgren (CA-19), Jerry McNerney (CA-09), Ken Calvert (CA-42), Jim Costa (CA-16), Grace Napolitano (CA-32), Lois Capps (CA-24), Anna Eshoo (CA-18), Ami Bera (CA-07), Mike Honda (CA-17), Linda Sanchez (CA-38), Loretta Sanchez (CA-46), Sam Farr (CA-20), Barbara Lee (CA-13), Gloria Negrete McLeod (CA-35), Lucille Roybal-Allard (CA-40), Susan Davis (CA-53), Karen Bass (CA-37), Henry Waxman (CA-33), Janice Hahn (CA-44), Judy Chu (CA-27), Tony Cardenas (CA-29).

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