

Interagency Levee Task Force



RAISING THE STANDARD

February 2009

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Interagency Levee Task Force meets in Chicago



Interagency Levee Task Force partners at the Jan. 22, 2009 meeting in Chicago, Ill.

Article and photos by Candy Walters

After almost six months of work, the Interagency Levee Task Force is standing at the crossroads.

Will it sit back and rest on its laurels, patting itself on the back for being able to open some communication channels? Or will it push forward and "Raise the Standard" by not only asking the hard questions, but making a commitment to work together to get the answers and turn the task force into some type of permanent organization to address the entire spectrum of flood risk management on a regional level?

Those were the questions Brig. Gen. Michael C. Walsh, chairman of the ILTF, posed at the conclusion of the group's Jan. 22 meeting in Chicago at the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Region V offices.

Walsh, commander of the Mississippi Valley Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, commended the group for "breaking new ground, but we've been here before. What does the future look like? We need to figure out where the policy levels are within our agencies. How can we 'Raise the Standard' so all levels of government are nestled together to provide good support?"

With possible spring flooding just around the corner, preparedness, repair of the levees damaged in the 2008 floods, communicating flood risk effectively, and a renewed focus on holistic flood risk management, not just levee repair, were all on the minds of the task force members.

On the mind of Vicki Stoller, administrator of the Two Rivers Levee and Drainage Association in Iowa, was the lack of consistency, amount of paperwork and the rigidity of the missions of the various federal agencies tasked with "helping" before, during and after floods. She encouraged the task force members to cut the red tape. "It can be done if you want to do it," Stoller said.

Stoller said members of her association find the bureaucracy to be very frustrating, especially when they are forced to redo paperwork when new people come onboard at the various agencies with their ideas of how to address the issues differently.

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“There’s a great deal more to be done to prevent flooding in the future,” Stoller reminded the task force members. “The enthusiasm you’ve shown needs to be sustained. Together, with all our input, we can do better.”

And according to Steve Buan, a service coordination hydrologist with the North Central River Forecast Center, the National Weather Service’s Spring 2009 flood outlook could require seatbelts for some folks as early primary indicators point toward a high level of risk.

Heavy precipitation during the fall, heavy snow accumulation equivalent to an entire winter falling on frozen ground, and increasing annual precipitation all coupled with the coldest winter in 15 years means that forecasters are not optimistic that flooding will bypass the region, Buan said

A presentation by Larry Buss of the Corps’ Omaha District on non-

structural mitigation measures also resulted in a lengthy discussion by ILTF members. They discussed various non-structural mitigation techniques, measures, the role of the National Flood Insurance Program, the benefits of statewide building codes for floodplains, the authorities of the various agencies, and the relationship of non-structural alternatives to cost share arrangements.

To further expand the group’s food risk reduction focus beyond just levees, a panel discussion was conducted on Non-Federal Earthen Dam Safety. Panelists included Meg Galloway of the state of Wisconsin, Manuela Johnson of Indiana, Mike Hanke of FEMA Region V and Ruth Book, representing the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Dam safety is a major concern not only throughout the region, but the nation as a whole. The speakers agreed that there needs to be more emphasis placed on communicating dam risks and hazards, and finding additional money to fund repairs on an ongoing basis.

Prompting the most discussion during the meeting was the presentation from the Illinois Interagency Levee Work Group of proposed policy recommendations stemming from the analysis of possible non-structural alternatives for two sites in the state – Vandalia and Henderson County/Gulfport.. Although no alternatives were recommended for adoption at this time, the policy changes would enable non-structural alternatives to be given more detailed analysis in the future.

After lengthy discussion, the ILTF agreed that it was not yet time to send the recommendations forward to the responsible agencies to address the proposed policy changes. The work group was asked to do some more interagency coordination, address several concerns ILTF members raised, and bring the recommendations back to the task force at the next meeting.

Moving forward, reorganization, education and ensuring that state groups are more fully engaged were all topics discussed during the meeting’s final presentation on the four courses of action that grew out of the FEMA/Corps Remedial Action Workshop in Florida the first week of December.

They are:

- Developing template charter, program management plan and standard operating procedures to be adopted by future task forces;
- Developing a comprehensive communications and education plan;
- Establishing and adopting a state-level framework for the future; and, Developing a long-term regional framework for the future.

Teams are working on each of the four actions, with recommendations and products expected at upcoming ILTF meetings, all with the goal of having actions completed before the current ILTF finishes its yearlong mission in July.

The next ILTF meeting is March 24 in St. Louis. Check www.iwr.usace.army.mil/iltf for more information.

What's next for ILTF?

Flood risk management is going to be the focus of the agenda for the next meeting of the Interagency Levee Task Force, set for March 24 in St. Louis.

Being hosted by the St. Louis District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the location for the 8:15 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. meeting is at the Goodfellow Federal Bldg., 4300 Goodfellow Blvd, St. Louis, Mo. The meeting will be held in the auditorium of building 105L on the complex.

With concerns about the spring flood season high on the members' minds, a portion of the meeting will be spent talking about Spring Flood Readiness.

A representative of the National Weather Service will give a forecast update and the U.S. Geological Service will discuss the status of river gauges to include the gauge data base and gauging plans. The presentation will focus on the river gauging fusion cell that was established during the Rainfall-River Forecast Summit in October in St. Louis.

George Reidel of the Association of State Floodplain Managers is slated to talk about the ASFPM program and floodplain management during flood recovery efforts.

Also on the agenda is a presentation on Wetlands Enhancement considerations by a Ducks Unlimited representative.

The National Committee on Levee Safety presented its recommendations on improving levee safety to members of Congress in February. A committee member is slated to talk about the program and its relationship with the ILTF.

The task force also will have time to discuss the proposed white papers and policy recommendations the various work groups have drafted, and receive an update on how the four courses of action that grew out of the Federal Emergency Management Agency/Corps Remedial Action Workshop are progressing.

Missouri news

Missouri has closed off all of the breached levees damaged last year that fall under the Corps of Engineers levee program with the following exceptions:

- Tebbetts East Levee, breached during September event, currently being prepared for solicitation of repair contract.
- Garden of Eden Levee, currently under contract. Repair has been delayed due to wet conditions. Anticipated restoration of level of protection within one month, weather dependant.

Other repair work addressing turfing/seeding, gravity drain pipes, and minor embankment earth work operations are still ongoing.

The State of Missouri facilitated the distribution of Housing and Urban Development Block Grant funds to several of the damaged levee districts; approximately \$1.4 million. Additional funds may be distributed under supplemental funding received by the State.



Repair of breached levees at Kings Lake.
Photos by John Zimmerman

Interagency Levee Task Force Meeting Chicago, Ill. — Jan. 22, 2009



Calendar of Events

▼ March 2009

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3 Ill. ILWG	4	5 Iowa ILWG	6	7
8	9	10	11 IAFSM	12 IAFSM	13	14
15	16	17 Ill. ILWG	18	19	20	21
22	23	24 ILTF Meeting	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

March Events and Points of Contacts

March 3 & 17 at 1 p.m.—Illinois Interagency Levee Work Group meeting via conference call. Call-in number: 888-959-1793, Passcode: 541342# Point of Contact: Hank DeHaan, 309-912-4532 Focus of the Ill. ILWG includes Policy Modification White Papers and Silver Jacket Development.

March 5 at 1 p.m.—Interagency Levee Work Group meeting at the JFO, Urbandale, Iowa . Call-in number: 800-320-4330, Passcode: 000156# Point of Contact: Jerry A. Skalak, 309-912-5153

March 11-12 - The annual Illinois Association for Floodplain and Stormwater Management conference will be meeting in Champaign, Ill. For more info: http://www.illinoisfloods.org/09_conference.html

March 24 at 8:15 a.m.—4:15 p.m.—Interagency Levee Task Force meeting, St. Louis, Mo., Goodfellow Federal Building, Point of Contact: Mike Kessler, 314-331-8576

*Have an event you would like to see added to the Events Calendar?
Email your information to: karen.buehler@usace.army.mil*