

Opinion: Clearing trees along rivers is not the answer

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The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is expected to soon decide whether to enact a draconian policy of tree cutting along river levees nationwide. The policy is a misdirected reaction to the Hurricane Katrina flooding of New Orleans, which exposed federal government to unprecedented liability.

Seventeen members of the California congressional delegation urged the Corps to reconsider this levee vegetation policy, for both economic and environmental reasons.

Trees in the wrong place undoubtedly pose a threat to levee integrity. Yet instead of taking a selective approach, the Corps following Katrina proposed a rigid ban on woody vegetation within 15 feet of levees and flood walls.

If enforced nationwide, flood districts could be forced to take chain saws to thousands of miles of riparian forest.

The Corps has a variance option, and recently granted one for 42 miles of levees in Natomas under repair by the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency. Yet SAFCA had to spend a large sum to obtain the variance and meet Corps directives relating to vegetation.

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