A NATIONAL LEVEE SAFETY PROGRAM
IS A CRITICAL INVESTMENT IN LIFE SAFETY AND
ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

To Water Resources Development Act Conferees:

On behalf of the undersigned nonfederal members of the National Committee on Levee Safety, we are writing to express our appreciation for your leadership in passing water resources bills. We also wish to signal our strong support for inclusion of the National Levee Safety Program in the H.R. 3080 Conference Report and the new Water Resources Reform and Development Act, which includes:

- A national levee database and an inventory and inspection of federal and non-federal levees;
- National levee safety guidelines and a hazard potential classification system for federal and non-federal levees;
- Research and development, and a national public education and awareness program;
- The coordination of levee safety, floodplain management, and environmental protection activities;
- The development of state and tribal levee safety programs; and
- The provision to states and Indian tribes of technical assistance and materials that address levee safety and flood risks.

Importantly, Title VI, the Levee Safety title in S. 601, also provides for grants to states and Indian tribes to establish levee safety programs, and grants to states, Indian tribes, and local governments to conduct flood mitigation activities that reduce flood risk associated with levees.

Call to Action: We are at a critical juncture in our nation’s history – risks of loss of life, property damage and damage to our natural environment behind levees are increasing. The potential consequences of levee failure can be devastating. Risks to life and property associated with levees are continuing to rise, fueled by a combination of factors intensified by an uncoordinated approach, including:

- Aging infrastructure.
- Intensification of development in areas behind levees.
- Lack of robust standards for levee construction, operations, maintenance and non-structural mitigation activities.
- Lack of awareness of the nature and level of risk by the public and community officials.
- Misalignment of federal programs confuses the public’s understanding of risk and incentivizes behavior that promotes reliance on federal post-flood disaster relief.
- Increased likelihood of high water due to increased runoff due to land use and predicted intensification of rain events and storms.

The Nation needs strong national coordination and leadership to support the development of effective state and local levee safety programs. A National Levee Safety Program is a wise investment in reducing the costs of future levee-related flood disasters, and moves the country away from a reactive and expensive disaster assistance environment to a proactive, safety-oriented culture; one where the general public and governments are informed and able to participate in shared responsibilities of risk
management. Levee safety deserves a priority focus within national infrastructure needs as levees protect much of the other infrastructure – hospitals, roads, bridges, schools, power plants, and water and sewer treatment plants – from frequent flooding.

**Background:** The National Levee Safety Act of the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 established the National Committee on Levee Safety and directed the Committee to develop recommendations for a national levee safety program. Six years later, as the H.R. 3080, Water Resources Reform and Development Act, conferees consider the inclusion of a National Levee Safety Program under a new WRDA, the non-federal members of the National Committee on Levee Safety want to offer the benefit of our research, analysis and deliberations as well as extend an offer to work with the conferees in whatever manner deemed useful to create this much needed program.

**Overview of Recommendations:** The National Committee on Levee Safety completed its report in January, 2009, and put forward 20 recommendations for creating a National Levee Safety Program. The specific recommendations of the National Committee on Levee Safety for a National Levee Safety Program embrace three main concepts: (1) the need for leadership via a National Levee Safety Board / Commission, which would support state delegated programs, provide national technical standards and risk communication, and coordinate environmental and safety concerns; (2) the creation of strong levee safety programs in all states, which would oversee critical levee safety processes; and (3) a foundation of well-aligned policies and programs across the many federal agencies that are currently involved in levee issues. A full copy of the report including detailed rationale for each recommendation can be found at [www.levesafety.org](http://www.levesafety.org).

Since 2009, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Emergency Management Agency have been working to implement elements of the Committee’s levee safety recommendations under current authorities, programs and budgets. However, implementation of many of the Committee’s recommendations for creating a National Levee Safety Program requires new legislation. A National Levee Safety Program is needed to provide comprehensive and consistent national leadership and a focal point for the development of levee safety programs within states. Attached to this letter is a legislative framework that provides an overview of important components to be included in a National Levee Safety Program created under WRDA authority. Many elements of this framework were included in Title VI of S.601, and we encourage conferees to include them in the conference bill.

Thank you for your attention to this important and urgently needed national investment.

The following members of the National Committee on Levee Safety are pleased to answer any questions about our recommended legislative framework establishing the National Levee Safety Program or the recommendations contained in Recommendations for a National Levee Safety Program: A Report to Congress from the National Committee on Levee Safety (January 15, 2009).

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*The National Levee Safety Act of the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 (PL 110-114, Title IX, Section 9003) established the Committee on Levee Safety and directed the Committee to develop recommendations for a national levee safety program. The National Committee on Levee Safety completed its draft report in January, 2009, and put forward 20 recommendations for creating a National Levee Safety Program. The draft report has been reviewed at the Office of Management and Budget and has been provided to the Congress.*
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