July 13, 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
CONTACT: John DeBeaux, Sutter County Emergency Operations Manager, 530-822-7400

State Emergency Officials Approve ‘Mission Request’ to Fix Damaged Levee in Southern Sutter County

A section of damaged levee that protects homes and farmland in the Nicolaus basin of Sutter County could be repaired before winter.

The California Emergency Management Agency notified Sutter County by email Tuesday that the County’s “Mission Request” for emergency repairs has been approved. Sutter County Emergency Operations Manager John DeBeaux informed the Sutter County Board of Supervisors Tuesday afternoon he is hopeful the state will soon begin repairing a 1,000 foot section of levee damaged during severe storms and high water in March.

Sutter County and Reclamation District 1001 officials have attempted since the storms to identify funding to fix the slumping, cracked levee on the northern bank of the Natomas Cross Canal at Verona.

The levee is owned by the state of California, and maintained by Reclamation District 1001, which lacks the financial capacity to repair the levee on its own. Sutter County has been assisting Reclamation District 1001 find state or federal disaster funds, or some other funding source, to fix the damage before water rises in the canal again.

Shortly after Reclamation District 1001 declared a state of emergency in the Nicolaus basin at the height of the March storms, the Sutter County Board of Supervisors declared a local state of emergency, which remains in effect.

Although Gov. Gerald Brown Jr. declared a state of emergency in 17 California counties, including Sutter, he did not authorize the use of California disaster funds to repair the levee. Instead, he requested federal disaster assistance, which was denied by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. While California is appealing that denial, local officials do not intend to sit still.

On July 1, local, state and federal officials met near the site of the damaged levee to discuss options. Among those in attendance were Congressman Wally Herger, Sutter County Board of Supervisors Chairman James Gallagher, Sutter County Administrator Stephanie Larsen, Emergency Operations Manager DeBeaux, Reclamation District 1001 Manager Diane Fales, and representatives from the Army Corps of Engineers, the California Department of Water Resources, and the Central Valley Flood Protection Agency.

Out of that meeting came additional meetings at the state level which resulted in Mr. DeBeaux on Monday, July 11, submitting a formal “Mission Request” to fix the levee under CalEMA’s formal emergency resource request procedure.
On Tuesday, CalEMA Acting Agency Secretary Mike Dayton emailed Mr. DeBeaux that the request had been approved. CalEMA will now coordinate with other state agencies to determine the specific source of funding and which agency will make the repairs. It is most likely to be the Department of Water Resources.

Mr. DeBeaux informed the Board of Supervisors that DWR could move quickly to make the repairs, but he had no further details at Tuesday’s meeting.

The Natomas Cross Canal—and recent improvements to levees on its south bank—provide important regional benefits, although it remains a threat to residents in the Nicolaus basin. The Natomas Cross Canal transports water from heavily urbanized Placer County across the farmlands of southern Sutter County into the Sacramento River.

In a project completed just last year, millions of dollars have been spent to fortify the levees on the southern bank of the Natomas Cross Canal. These levees protect thousands of new homes in the Natomas region of north Sacramento, as well as the Sacramento International Airport.

No improvements have been identified to the levees on the northern bank of the Natomas Cross Canal.

###