



REPLY TO  
ATTENTION OF

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY**  
SEATTLE DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS  
P.O. BOX 3755  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98124-3755

Civil Programs and Projects Branch

FEB 17 2012

Dear Interested Party:

I am writing to provide you with an update on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) flood-risk management policy and the specific topic of vegetation on levees associated with the Corps' Levee Safety Program and the P.L. 84-99 Program (codified under 33 U.S.C. 701n).

The P.L. 84-99 program provides for, among other things, the repair and restoration of participating flood-risk reduction projects, such as levee systems, to pre-disaster condition if they are damaged by a flood event. Participation in this program is voluntary and is dependent upon the levee system being maintained in a manner that the Corps determines will provide for its reliable performance. One of the inspection criteria is vegetation management.

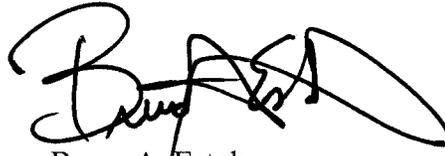
The Corps' DRAFT new policy document titled "Policy Guidance Letter (PGL) – Process for Requesting a Variance from Vegetation Standards for Levees and Floodwalls" was posted in the Federal Register on February 17, 2012 for a 60-day public comment period. I have enclosed a copy of the DRAFT PGL, a fact sheet about it, and a DRAFT Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact so you may better understand the Corps' decisionmaking process when revising policies and aligning programs to attain national consistency.

Since the DRAFT PGL variance process can occur as part of a System-Wide Improvement Framework (SWIF), I have also enclosed the November 29, 2011 SWIF policy. It is important to note that while the PGL and SWIF provide pathways to transition from the Seattle District's existing vegetation variance which dates to 1995, the existing variance remains in effect for inspections while the SWIF process and/or variance requests for specific levees are being implemented to include completion of environmental compliance analysis and coordination.

The DRAFT PGL revises the Corps' previous version of February 9, 2010 based on review and consideration of public comments, coordination with resource agencies at the national level, and synchronization with agency-wide approaches and policies implemented since the previous vegetation variance request policy issued in 2001. Key revisions between the 2010 DRAFT and the current DRAFT include: clarification of responsibilities during the request process; clarification of technical requirements so the likelihood of obtaining an approved vegetation variance is identified early in the process; incorporation of language to ensure resource agencies and Tribal Nations are engaged throughout the process; and description of the overlap with the SWIF policy.

The DRAFT PGL is now posted on the Federal Register and available for comment. The link to the Federal Register posting is: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-02-17/pdf/2012-3701.pdf>. While comments on the DRAFT PGL should be sent to the address specified in the Federal Register--which is: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Attn: CECW-CE, Tammy Conforti, 441 G Street NW, Washington, DC 20314-1000--Seattle District staff is available to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about flood risk management, levee safety, or vegetation standards. These can be directed to Dennis Fischer, the Seattle District's Levee Safety Program Manager, at (206) 764-3555 or [dennis.a.fischer@usace.army.mil](mailto:dennis.a.fischer@usace.army.mil).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce A. Estok", written in a cursive style.

Bruce A. Estok  
Colonel, Corps of Engineers  
District Commander

Enclosures