

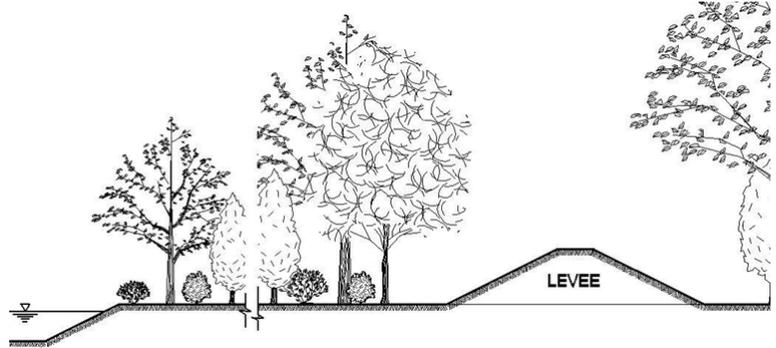


Vegetation Variance Request Policy

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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The US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) considers its levee vegetation management standards critical to flood risk reduction project performance and reliability, and most importantly, life safety. These standards include a minimum 15-foot vegetation-free-zone, its primary purpose to provide critical accessibility for safety inspections, operation and maintenance, and floodfighting. USACE recognizes carrying out its responsibility for life safety through the operation and maintenance of structurally-sound levee systems requires the agency to address environmental and natural resource needs and the rights and interests of Tribal Nations through compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, and treaties. For these situations, a levee sponsor, to include USACE, may request a vegetation variance to implement alternative vegetation management standards for a levee or portion of a levee as long as structural integrity and functionality of the levee are retained.



In August 2009, USACE began revising its existing vegetation variance request process, issued in 2001, to reflect changes in the organization and to foster greater consistency. The main revisions included,

- Variance requests will be considered on an individual levee system basis to account for site-specific levee and natural resource conditions.
- Variance requests must meet specific technical requirements.
- A technical review requirement and final approval by USACE Headquarters to ensure national consistency in approaches and decision-making.
- A corresponding vegetation management plan is required to ensure that vegetation retained on a levee will not increase risk over time from lack of attention.
- Environmental compliance responsibilities were clarified to promote effective collaboration with federal and state natural resource agencies and Tribes.

USACE does not typically solicit formal public comments on internal agency policies, but because of levee sponsor interest regarding how changes to this vegetation variance request process may impact them, USACE solicited comments on the proposed revisions through the Federal Register (FR) from Feb. 9, 2010 to Apr. 26, 2010. For a summary of the public comments and USACE responses, please visit <http://www.nfrmp.us/guidance.cfm>.

USACE posted, for the second time, a revised draft vegetation variance request policy in Feb. 2012 in the Federal Register for a 60-day public comment period. The revised draft policy reflects 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. The 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 System-wide Improvement Framework policy.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS – HEADQUARTERS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

WWW.USACE.ARMY.MIL/LEVEESAFETY

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