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News for Immediate Release
October 29, 2013

OREGON SOLUTIONS PROJECT TO ADDRESS FEDERAL FLOOD PROTECTION REQUIREMENTS ON COLUMBIA CORRIDOR LEVEE SYSTEM

At the request of the Multnomah County Drainage District (MCDD) and many stakeholders in the Portland region, Governor John Kitzhaber has designated the Columbia Corridor levee system project an Oregon Solutions collaborative project. The project will be co-convened by Portland Mayor Charlie Hales and Multnomah County Chair Marissa Madrigal. The Multnomah County Drainage District, the Port of Portland and the City of Portland are jointly sponsoring the project.

“Oregonians have shown, time and time again, that they can find solutions to complex challenges through a thoughtful, collaborative approach,” said Governor Kitzhaber. “These levees are critical to both the metropolitan area and the state as a whole, and I’m confident that we can work together to secure the levees’ accreditation, reduce the risk of catastrophic flooding, and protect the health and resiliency of nearby communities and the broader region.”

In recent years – as lessons have been learned from major flooding disasters around the country – the Federal agencies responsible for oversight of the nation’s levee systems have taken new approaches to managing their safety and risk programs. As a result of these changes, a key flood risk rating currently granted to the levees in the Columbia Corridor drainage districts through the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s National Flood Insurance Program, called accreditation, must be renewed. If the levees do not maintain their rating in this important program the economic implications will be significant. The deadline for this multi-year effort is unknown, but could be as soon as September 2015. Many other communities with levees in Oregon and around the country are faced with a similar situation.

“I am confident that this collaborative approach is the best way to ensure that we maintain our critical key flood risk rating,” said Mayor Hales. “Our levee system is large and complex and we want to make sure that the diverse needs of all constituents in the Columbia Corridor are taken into account.”

The Oregon Solutions process on the Columbia Corridor will kick off in late November. The first phase – anticipated to be completed in summer 2014 – will focus on seeking agreement on needed improvements and the associated costs. The second phase will focus on cost sharing, the regulatory approval process and other implementation issues and is tentatively scheduled to be finished in fall 2014.

“This effort represents our best chance to be proactive and mindful of the needs of all the property owners and residents of the areas behind the levees,” Chair Madrigal said. “The stakes are too high – we must work together to protect our collective interests. Like the other vulnerable populations we protect, we can’t sit back and wait for something to happen before we as a community act. We have to make it happen.”

Governor Kitzhaber formed Oregon Solutions in 2001, which is a part of the National Policy Consensus Center at Portland State University. Oregon Solutions provides a system and process for problem solving, called community governance, whereby community leaders join forces to define a problem, agree on a solution, and collaborates towards a resolution. The Oregon Solutions process brings business, nonprofit, and civic sector voices to the table to make commitments, take on specific roles and responsibilities, leverage and pool resources, and ultimately solve the problem.

MCDD reduces the risk of flooding to lives, property and the environment through proactive flood plain management along the Columbia River from Smith and Bybee Lakes to the Sandy River. MCDD manages four drainage districts in the Columbia Corridor which contain over 2,000 landowners and over 12,000 acres of land. The levees protect about 10 percent of the jobs in Multnomah County, major public assets, and several residential neighborhoods. Visit www.mcdd.org for more information.

If you would like more information about this topic, please email or call Kayla Mullis at kmullis@mcdd.org or 503-281-5675 x312.