



Levee System Vegetation Management

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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Background

- Public safety is the number one priority of the USACE Levee Safety Program.
- Clear policies and standards, consistently applied and enforced, are critical components of the USACE Levee Safety Program.
- USACE vegetation-management standards are contained in Engineering Technical Letter (ETL) No. 1110-2-571 *Guidelines for Landscape Planting and Vegetation Management at Levees, Floodwalls, Embankment Dams, and Appurtenant Structures*, 10 April 2009.
- This ETL does not establish **new** standards, but clarifies, and supersedes, those formerly presented in EM 1110-2-301 (Jan. 1, 2000).
- An Independent External Peer Review and Independent Technical Review (ITR) validated the ETL based upon existing and available engineering and scientific data.
- The ETL is available on the USACE publication website at: <http://140.194.76.129/publications/eng-tech-ltrs/etl1110-2-571/toc.htm>.



Key Points

- Levees must be properly operated and maintained to reduce flood risk to communities living and working behind these levees. Inspections are conducted to determine whether levees are being properly operated and maintained.
- Vegetation and other encroachments can harm the structural integrity of levees, obscure visibility, impede access for maintenance and inspection, and/or hinder emergency flood fighting operations.
- To date, no research exists to justify a reduction to USACE existing vegetation-management standards.
- Any change to current USACE vegetation management policy and standards will be based upon sound engineering and science, and will not adversely affect public safety.
- Public safety will remain the paramount consideration.
- The minimum acceptable Vegetation Free Zone (VFZ) is defined as including the levee itself (including any appurtenant structures) plus a corridor fifteen feet in width on either side of the levee and its appurtenant structures. Fifteen feet is the minimum acceptable width for this corridor, adequate under ideal conditions but considered insufficient under other conditions.
- If an existing project easement (real estate interest) allows for less than 15 feet, the VFZ shall be the maximum attainable within the existing real estate interest.
- The ETL discusses a limited range of conditions under which a variance to vegetation standards may be granted.
- USACE is working with local sponsors to determine the best path forward for areas with noncompliant vegetation and endangered species.