

perienced three floods that were at or near the threshold of “100-year floods”—in 1955, 1986, and 1997. The “100-year flood” is defined as a flood that occurs once in every 100 years, but it really means that the water discharges are far above, roughly double, the norm for winter months, which is the peak precipitation period for California. Thus, the “100-year flood” has occurred three times in the last 42 years. Its appearance should be expected and planned for. The 1955 “100-year flood” killed 23 people. The 1986 “100-year flood,” which was as severe as the current one, caused \$1 billion in damage. A serious flood in 1995 was responsible for \$1.8 billion in damage. It is unacceptable to be “caught by surprise” by flooding.

More safeguards can easily be built into California’s flood control system to enable it to cope with a 100-year flood. This is not pie in the sky. In fact, when America was committed to economic growth, it used to be part of the standard planning activity of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the California Department of Water Resources, which devises and implements, along with other agencies, the state’s water plan. That plan is updated, on average, every five years. In the past, there were plans to build water projects in California to protect against even “150-year” and “200-year floods,” but the projects were not built. Since 1991, when George Bush ally and fiscal conservative Pete Wilson became governor, even planning has been abandoned. In the 1993 “California Water Plan Update,” Wilson made everything pass the test of not whether it is needed, but whether it is “cost effective,” according to narrowly defined criteria. This is part of the post-industrial, anti-infrastructure, budget-cutting ideology.

Under competent planning, redundancy would be built into the system, and if a portion of the system were faulty or under stress, it would be either upgraded, or the system as a whole would be strengthened. Naser Bateni, a longtime veteran of the California Department of Water Resources, who was program manager for state planning for five years, and is now district chief of the Northern Water District, told *EIR* on Feb. 25 about a structural defect in California’s flood control system which became apparent in a major way during the 1986 flood. Nothing was done about it. Bateni reported:

“During the height of the 1986 flood, the Folsom Reservoir, which is on the American River above the city of Sacramento, was filled to overflowing. The channel capacity below the reservoir could handle 115,000 cubic feet per second, and the Folsom Reservoir was releasing into it about 135,000 cubic feet per second, more than the channel could handle. If it had rained another half-day, the unregulated release from the reservoir would have potentially flooded the city of Sacramento. Several tens of thousands of homes would have been affected; we would have had a disaster.”

A dam needed at Auburn

The Folsom Reservoir lies on the American River (see **Figure 2**), which is a tributary of the Sacramento River, California’s most powerful river system. Toward the headwaters of the American River lies Auburn, a site where for more than 30 years, various Army Corps of Engineers specialists and hydrologists have proposed building a dam. All the design and feasibility studies have been completed. The Auburn project was planned to have a storage capacity of 2.3 million acre-

EIR fuels infrastructure vulnerability debate

On July 15, 1996, President Clinton signed Executive Order 13010, establishing a Presidential Commission on Strategic Infrastructure Vulnerability. The commission, as we reported in the March 7 *EIR*, has a one-year mandate to conduct a nationwide survey of the transportation, energy, telecommunications, banking, and financial infrastructure of the United States, to determine where there may be points of vulnerability, and recommend a course of action to repair the damage before a national disaster strikes.

Although the impetus for the commission arose over concern about the threat of sophisticated terrorist attack in the wake of the World Trade Center and Oklahoma City bombings, the mandate of the panel is far broader, according to commission officials interviewed by *EIR*. The com-

mission is concerned about all possible sources of vulnerability, including lack of investment and replacement-maintenance, natural disasters, and irregular warfare assaults, whether in the form of physical or “cyber attack” through disruption of computer support systems.

For decades, *EIR* has been detailing the crippling effects of deregulation, privatization, and the post-industrial ideology that has fueled an across-the-board policy of disinvestment in our physical economy, especially our hard and soft infrastructure. As the result of this work, *EIR* is uniquely situated to foster a public debate on the commission’s mandate. The commission will be holding hearings, beginning in April 1997, in five cities across the United States to solicit public input into its deliberations.

In the March 7 *EIR*, we published a report on the devastating impact of deregulation and disinvestment in our nation’s electrical power grid, as the first in a series of studies on the national infrastructure crisis. We continue this series with this report, by Richard Freeman, on the collapse of the water-management system in California.