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Failure to Plan or Planning Failure?

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ABSTRACT

The aftermath of Katrina suggests of failure of the governing operations of the US Corps of Engineers (USCOE) and its planning apparatus along the lower Mississippi. Yet the planning service functions of the Corps have long been in decline. Many applaud the change, but the problem of Katrina, for example, is not a failure of a plan but rather a glaring deviation from congressionally mandated and USCOE planning protocols. Aside from the persistent response of Congress to de-fund its own mandated studies; US water planning is hobbled by four intractable structural inconsistencies that would retard most foreseeable water system planning alternatives, especially in managing eastern watersheds. These charges against planning are misplaced and they irresponsibly increase the risks of hazardous events - floods, drought privation, failing infrastructure: . First, multiple use planning often equates to 'commoditization' of water. Accommodation to reallocate reservoirs becomes a tradable water regime; . Second, multiple stake-holder compacts driving water policy are viewed as antithetical to planning. Yet this is another form of multiple-use planning; . Third, the evolution of endowing 'rights' to the beneficiaries of an authorized purpose defies other fourth amendment precedents. This innovation restrains severely the capacity to remain adaptive in management plans; . Fourth, adjustments and reallocations have to respond, traditionally, to single standard environmental targets while also distancing professional economists from the accommodation exercise to locate the least costly accommodation. These objections to USCOE planning aspire to laudable goals regarding water policy and the processes by which it is made, yet these aspirations work at cross purposes and, taken as a whole, are internally inconsistent and dangerous. Yet vibrant stake-holder participation and accommodation, environmental protection, adaptive management for multiple social objectives, economic growth and severe hazard avoidance can be reconciled to USCOE Principles and Guidelines. Much of what is risky in water management today is a self-subverting surrender of the planning functions embedded already, particularly, in the principle of Separable Costs, Remaining Benefits (SCRB).

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