

YAZOO-MISSISSIPPI DELTA LEVEE DISTRICT

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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER COMMISSION August 16, 2016 Helena River Park, Helena, AR

Major General Wehr, and other distinguished members of the Commission, my name is Bruce Cook. I am the Chief Engineer for the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Levee Board that is located in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Our district encompasses all or part of ten delta counties and lies partially within the Memphis District and partially within the Vicksburg District. The Board of Levee Commissioners for the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta is charged with the responsibility to erect, maintain and operate a system of levees to protect the people and property of the Delta from damages of high waters of the Mississippi River. The Board also directs the necessary activities attendant to the threat of high water and flood damages from interior rivers and streams and furnishes the local cooperation required for certain flood control and drainage projects of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Our Board has worked hard to protect the people of the Delta from the devastation of flooding. I would like to thank you for your continued efforts to also protect people in the Mississippi Valley from flooding.

It is very important that we continue to work together to complete the much needed flood control projects so flooding can be reduced in the lower Mississippi River Valley. The President's budget usually does not include enough funds to support the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers capability concerning flood control projects. For this reason, levee commissioners and staff of the Yazoo-Mississippi Levee Board along with many other men and women from up and down the river travel to our nation's capitol seeking additional MR&T funding.

While in Washington, D.C., the Commissioners for the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Levee District asked the Mississippi Congressional Delegation to pledge support of a \$500 Million dollar annual budget for the MR&T project. The Levee Board also asked for a 2

Billion dollar supplemental water infrastructure investment to be delivered as projects in 18 months to help repair and restore the MR&T system after the recent January 2016 flooding along the Mississippi River. It is imperative that the MR&T project receive the proper funding to expediently move toward completion. Currently the MR&T project is only 89% complete and will not pass the Project Design Flood.

As a levee sponsor, we are obligated to provide the minor maintenance to the mainline Mississippi River Levees from the Mississippi, Tennessee state line down to the Coahoma, Bolivar County line. Our levee system is approximately 98 miles long. We have traditionally received the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers "Outstanding Maintenance Award" for levee maintenance for the past 50 years with the last recognition of outstanding maintenance being in 2009. Our annual levee inspections have gone from an "Acceptable" rating pre Katrina to a "Minimally Acceptable" rating post Katrina. We have not changed the way the levee system is maintained. We feel that a "Minimally Acceptable" rating of the mainline levee indicates that the levee system is sub-standard and our maintenance of the levee system is being called into question. These levees were designed and built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and are considered to be the best levees in the world. We would like to see the levee rating correspond to how the levees held up during the historic 2011 flood. How can a levee system be rated "Unacceptable" or "Minimally Acceptable" and pass a record flood?

We cannot forget to program the needed funds into the construction and maintenance of our many tributaries. The main stem has traditionally received the majority of funding. Our Levee Board provides minor maintenance for approximately 18 miles of Yazoo Backwater Levees in Warren and Yazoo Counties. The maintenance roadway that runs along the top of the backwater levee is in very bad shape. The maintenance roadway has very little surface material which causes rutting and pot holes after a rain event. We respectfully ask the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to consider providing enough limestone rock to cover the 18 miles of backwater levees to ensure that the maintenance roadway can hold up to traffic during routine levee maintenance as well as during a flood event. During our recent visit to Washington, D.C. we asked our Mississippi Congressional Delegation to appropriate additional funds to the Yazoo Basin, Yazoo Backwater, MS Maintenance FY 2017 budget to hopefully expedite receiving the much needed surface material.

While the Mainline levee remains our number one priority in the effort to reduce flooding in the Mississippi Delta, we also focus on the importance of the much-needed maintenance of many of our rivers, lakes and streams. These rivers, lakes, and streams are vital to the health of the Delta. The Upper Yazoo Project was conceived in 1939. The project includes a system of flood control reservoirs which discharge into a system of channels and levees intended to safely convey headwater from the hills to the Mississippi River. The Upper Yazoo Project has not received funding in the President's budget since FY 2010. This had caused the project to stop advancing towards completion. I am, however, happy to report that the project did receive additional congressional funding and was funded at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers full capability of \$9.1 Million for FY 16. While we were in Washington D.C. meeting with our

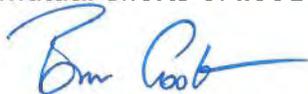
Mississippi Congressional Delegation we asked for support of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers FY 17 full capability of \$11 Million for the Upper Yazoo Project. Hopefully we can keep the momentum going and help expedite the completion of the Upper Yazoo Project. Once completed, the citizens of Marks, MS in Quitman County could potentially realize a reduction in interior flooding from the Coldwater River of up to 4 feet.

The Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Levee Board also feels that additional funding is needed for the Mississippi Delta Headwater Project. This project is very important because it uses various types of structures and procedures that limit the amount of sediments that would normally end up being deposited into our many river systems. The President's FY 2017 budget currently has no funds appropriated to the Mississippi Delta Headwater Project. The Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Levee Board fully supports an amount of \$12,550,000 Million to match the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers full capabilities for this needed project.

I would like to also mention the importance of providing yearly funding in the amount of \$20 Million for dredging all of the small ports and harbors along the Mississippi River. The ability to utilize the Mississippi River to transport food products to the rest of the country and the world is vital to our economy.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is known worldwide for its ability to engineer and construct facilities that protect people and property as well as promote navigation along our many rivers to strengthen our national economy. Please do not continue to let regulatory processes prevent the current projects from reaching completion as well as stopping much needed future projects all together. The Waters of the US (WOTUS) "Rule Clarification", Executive Order 13690 (Federal Flood Risk Management Standard) and the recently released "Final Guidance on Considering Climate Change in Environmental Reviews" by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) are all over reaching Federal regulation tools that can and will be used to stop the completion of existing flood control and navigation projects and prevent the start of new flood control and navigation projects.

In closing, I would like to thank you for allowing me to address some of the concerns that our levee board has concerning flood control in the Mississippi Delta. In speaking for my Commissioners and the people they represent across the district, we appreciate the support that we have received through past years and look forward to continuing our mutual efforts of flood control and flood protection for the Mississippi Delta.



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