

Dear Mr. Brewer:

Thank you for your statement before the Mississippi River Commission public meeting held in Cairo, Illinois, on March 4, 2002. In your statement you expressed satisfaction with the Commerce to Birds Point levee raise and the new pumping station at Drinkwater; support for the St. Johns Bayou and New Madrid Floodway project; opposition to any change in the operating plan for the Missouri River; and concern over the 2-year Reservoir Operations Study on the Tennessee River by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).

Thank you for your kind remarks regarding the improvements to the Commerce to Birds Point levee and the new pumping station at Drinkwater. These components are important improvements to the flood protection system in this reach of the Mississippi River. The Memphis District will initiate the Harmon Sewer culvert replacement in May or June of this year with construction scheduled to be completed this construction season.

The Corps understands your disappointment and frustration because of delays in implementing the St. Johns Bayou and New Madrid Floodway project. The Commission shares your opinion that the project should be implemented as soon as possible. The Memphis District is now preparing the revised Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) and plans to file the SEIS with the Environmental Protection Agency early this summer, thereby beginning a 30-day state and agency review. At this time, the Memphis District will also request water quality certification from the state of Missouri for the preferred plan. A Record of Decision (ROD) could be signed after the 30-day state and agency review of the Final SEIS and consideration of comments received during that review. Signing of the ROD, along with water quality certification, would complete the requirements for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and clear the way for construction on the project to be resumed.

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With regard to the Missouri River Master Manual Review and Update, the Mississippi Valley Division (MVD) continues to support Northwestern Division (NWD) efforts to identify an appropriate flow management plan that complies with laws and is consistent with contemporary needs of the Missouri and

Mississippi River Basins. MVD has evaluated Mississippi River impacts for over 200 modified reservoir operation alternatives. The most recently evaluated alternatives included plans that incorporate a controlled spring rise and a split Missouri River navigation season. The impacts on Mississippi River flood stages and navigation efficiency were measurable but minor. The plans are beneficial to Mississippi River navigation during the traditionally low flow period of November and December. More detailed evaluations of Mississippi River environmental and dredging impacts are being continued for these alternatives.

The continuing evaluations are scheduled to be complete in early May 2002. The current NWD schedule for implementing a revision to the Master Manual requires that the Corps identify a Preferred Alternative (PA) by May 31, 2002. Upon identification of the PA, the Corps will consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). A Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), which presents a detailed analysis of the impacts of the PA, will be released this summer. Following a 30-day comment period for the FEIS, the Corps intends to complete ESA consultation on the PA with the USFWS, prepare a Record of Decision, revise the Master Manual itself, and incorporate the revised flow management plan into the annual operation plan. In its Biological Opinion of November 2000, USFWS recommended that a revised flow management plan be implemented no later than 2003. The Corps intends to have a new flow management plan in place by 2003 to comply with the Service's timeline.

The Reservoir Operations Study was recommended by TVA's citizen advisory group, the Regional Stewardship Council. The study will determine if changes in TVA's current reservoir system operating policies could produce greater overall public value. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the process is being conducted with full public participation and results will be documented in an Environmental Impact Statement. The study is scheduled to be completed in October 2003. The Corps' interests in the flood control, navigation, and environment of the Lower Mississippi Valley are being coordinated by Mississippi Valley Division Water Control personnel with the staff of the Great Lakes and Ohio River Division (LRD). The LRD office is on the TVA interagency review team. There has been a

general understanding and consensus between the Corps and TVA that no changes will be considered that will impact the flood control or navigation interests in the Mississippi River Valley below TVA's Kentucky Lake on the Tennessee River which is operated in unison with the Corps' Barkley Lake on the Cumberland River.

The Commission appreciates receiving your comments and looks forward to hearing from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Edwin J. Arnold, Jr.  
Brigadier General, U.S. Army  
President, Mississippi River  
Commission