

Dear Mr. Dowdy:

Thank you for your presentation before the Mississippi River Commission during the public meeting held in Memphis, Tennessee, on August 20, 2001. In your formal statement you discussed (a) annual funding for the St. Francis Basin project; (b) adherence to the St. Francis Basin Maintenance 5-Year Master Plan; (c) the brush control program; (d) investigation and surveys downstream of the Arkansas/Missouri state line; (e) opposition to alleged delay of projects by environmental groups; (f) extension of the St. Francis Basin project; and (g) the public affairs strategy of the Corps of Engineers.

The Commission recognizes your concerns regarding annual funding levels of the St. Francis Basin Maintenance project. We acknowledge funding levels in the President's budget request are generally not sufficient to effectively maintain this project. As a result, the backlog of maintenance items is increasing. Funding for this project competes with funding for other studies and projects under the Mississippi River and Tributaries appropriation. Funding decisions for specific projects and studies are based on relative need and priority of work in the lower Mississippi River valley. The Commission, its staff, and the staff of the Memphis District will continue to work with you and other organizations to provide professional and specific information relative to the value of water resources investments to the nation.

In regard to adherence to the St. Francis Basin 5-Year Master Plan, the Memphis District will continue to work this program and execute needed maintenance based on available funding and relative priority of work.

The Memphis District inspects channels each year in the St. Francis Basin project to identify brush kill results and areas that need herbicide application. The District is preparing to award a 5-Year Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity contract for application of herbicides along ditch banks. A similar contract was initiated 5 years ago and has been completed.

The Memphis District is continuing to investigate the performance of the completed flood control improvements in the vicinity of Lower Belle Fountain and State Line outlet ditches in southeast Missouri and northeast Arkansas as funding and other priorities permit. The investigations also include the effects of the Rivervale Floodway on drainage conditions in the area.

The Commission recognizes your concerns regarding delays to projects and construction of particular items of work as a result of alleged actions on the part of environmental agencies and interest groups. Unfortunately, delays do occur to Corps studies and projects for a variety of reasons. We do not believe that it is accurate or constructive to place the blame for delays on any particular interest group. The Corps is required to formulate and evaluate proposed projects in accordance with the 1983 Economic and Environmental Principles and Guidelines for Water and Related Land Resources Implementation Studies (P&G). The P&G and other laws and policies, particularly the National Environmental Policy Act, call for the Corps to develop alternatives that are sensitive to many different competing interests and desires. We believe that the Corps' planning process ultimately results in recommended studies and projects that best serve the nation and meet the needs of all stakeholders. However, we continue to look for ways to improve our coordination with all stakeholders, particularly the environmental interests, throughout all phases of our projects in an effort to minimize and hopefully preclude delays to completing projects.

The Memphis District staff will contact you regarding the extension of the St. Francis Basin project and provide the information you need related to this matter.

The Commission acknowledges your concern regarding the lack of positive news coverage about the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Public affairs offices throughout the Corps, to include the Mississippi Valley Division, do an admirable job of providing local, regional, and national media outlets with press releases, fact sheets, story ideas, web page updates, and interviews. However, the Corps of Engineers is prohibited from buying advertising, and we do not control what the media chooses to cover. Although it appears that national media outlets do not cover Corps issues unless controversial, local and regional publications do routinely publish information about the Corps' programs, projects, and people. The Corps is committed to continue to work hard to get positive stories to the public through the media. We will also continue to maintain project websites to provide the public a more balanced and objective view of Corps projects.

Thank you again for your presentation. 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 Designee, Mississippi  
River Commission