

Dear Senator Dupre:

Thank you for your presentation during the Mississippi River Commission public meeting held in Houma, Louisiana, on August 23, 2002. In your statement you discussed coastal restoration, flood protection, and infrastructure. You also mentioned the Corps' role as the primary Federal agency assisting local government in each area.

The New Orleans District, in conjunction with the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources as the sponsor, is currently completing feasibility studies for two component projects of the Louisiana Coastal Area Comprehensive Plan. Draft feasibility reports for the Barataria Basin Wetland Creation and Restoration Study and the Barataria Basin Barrier Shoreline Restoration are nearing completion, and the final reports will be finished on a schedule that will allow these projects to be considered for authorization in a potential 2004 Water Resources Development Act.

The Commission is aware of and encouraged by the degree of community support for the Morganza to the Gulf of Mexico project that is evidenced by the passage of a \$3.6 million local tax issue by the voters of Terrebonne Parish. The Morganza to the Gulf of Mexico Feasibility Study is complete. The Chief of Engineers' report was signed on August 23, 2002. The National Economic Development plan providing a 100-year level of protection has been selected as the recommended plan. The Pre-construction Engineering and Design phase for levees and floodgates is underway. Work is progressing on the Project Management Plan. The first construction contract is scheduled for award in Fiscal Year 2005, pending Congressional

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authorization, appropriation of funds for construction, and execution of a Project Cooperation Agreement.

The Corps is evaluating the feasibility of deepening the Houma Navigation Canal to a 20-foot nominal depth. Preliminary calculations indicate that the deepening is economically justified. You will be provided an opportunity to review and comment on the recommended plan before it is finalized and forwarded to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Headquarters next

year for approval. We are also developing a cost estimate for the Greater Lafourche Port Commission for a 50-foot access channel to Port Fourchon via Belle Pass. The Port Commission may use this estimate as a basis for determining whether to pursue a feasibility study of deepening the existing 24-foot channel that was completed in 2000.

In 1990 the Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on the mitigation requirements of the Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines. The MOA established the "sequence" of avoiding and minimizing impacts first, then compensating (restoring, constructing, enhancing, or, in some instances, preserving wetlands) for wetland losses caused by permit issuance. Since 1992 it has also been the policy of the Executive Branch that there is a goal of no-net-loss of wetland functions and values lost as a result of permit issuance. Although the hurricane evacuation/ four-lane transportation corridor project that you mentioned is laudable, the requirements for compensation cannot be waived.

The Commission appreciates the support, cooperation, and assistance provided by the State of Louisiana. We welcome your comments and look forward to hearing from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Don T. Riley  
Brigadier General, U. S. Army  
President Designee, Mississippi  
River Commission