

Dear Mr. Gautreau:

Thank you for the statement made on your behalf by Mr. Mike Babin during the Mississippi River Commission public meeting held in Morgan City, Louisiana, on August 22, 2003. Mr. Babin presented comments on areas of concern to your office. Also, submitted for the record was a formal statement that expresses the views of your office and recommends improvements and continuing work on the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) flood control project. The responses below follow the order of topics submitted in your statement to the Commission.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN THE PONTCHARTRAIN LEVEE DISTRICT**

As noted in your statement, all mainline Mississippi River levees within the Pontchartrain Levee District are up to or above the designated grade.

The East Bank Gaps project has been funded and a contractor has been selected. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is now in negotiations with the contractor, and we expect to start construction of the pavement gaps this year. The Corps anticipates completing all remaining gaps in 2004.

Many levee areas of the Pontchartrain Levee District have sand/clay gravel surfacing on the levee crown. The New Orleans District will work with the Pontchartrain Levee District to replace the sand/clay gravel surface with crushed limestone.

-2-

The stone would be purchased by the Corps and spread by the levee district. Funding for this purpose has been requested for Fiscal Year 2004.

New Orleans District staff will continue to monitor sensitive riverbank areas to identify any problems that may develop. Each year the revetted banks on the Mississippi River are surveyed, monitored, and inspected for bank scour and bank caving. The Corps will continue to repair foreshore dikes, upper bank stone paving, and the articulated concrete mat revetments in order to protect the flood control and navigation systems along the Mississippi River.

**LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN AND VICINITY, HURRICANE PROTECTION**  
**ST. CHARLES PARISH**

The New Orleans District is continuing efforts to expedite the construction of the Lake Pontchartrain and Vicinity project in St. Charles Parish. Although the Corps has not received its appropriation for Fiscal Year 2004, we anticipate the need to secure additional project funds to maintain the construction schedule. We will attempt to transfer additional funds into the project during Fiscal Year 2004 to make up the shortfall. The District is proceeding as quickly as possible with the design and construction of this project.

The St. Rose, Almedia, and Walker Canal Drainage Structures are under construction. Completion of those structures is scheduled for 2004. The work at the gap of the Gulf South Pipeline has begun and is scheduled for completion by March 2004. The contract to close the final gap, at the Canadian National Railroad crossing, is scheduled for award in February 2004. This will provide a closed system of protection for the east bank of St. Charles Parish. Federal funds for this award and for the award of levee enlargements in Reach 2A and Reach 2B are not currently available.

**WEST SHORE, ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST PARISH**

Several alternative plans were evaluated during the plan formulation phase of the feasibility study. The results of this analysis were presented to the Pontchartrain Levee District and

-3-

St. John the Baptist Parish. St. John the Baptist Parish expressed concern with the proposed plan and submitted an alternative plan for consideration. Detailed designs and cost estimates were prepared for both of these plans. The results of our evaluations, based on Federal criteria, indicate that the plan we proposed is the best plan from an economic and environmental standpoint. The plan we proposed has an estimated first cost of \$151 million with a benefit-to-cost ratio of 2.4 to 1 and net benefits of \$15,800,000. Net benefits are the difference in average annual benefits and average annual costs. The plan proposed by St. John the Baptist Parish has an estimated first cost of \$240 million, a benefit-to-cost ratio of 1.6 to 1, and net benefits of \$9,900,000. The plan proposed

by St. John the Baptist would also enclose an additional 11,000 acres of wetlands within the protection.

Federal principles and guidelines for the development and implementation of water resources projects provide for the recommendation of the plan that provides the highest net benefits, consistent with protecting the Nation's environment. There is a provision in the Federal principles and guidelines for recommending a "locally preferred" plan. In order to recommend a locally preferred plan, the non-Federal sponsor must agree to pay 100 percent of the difference in the costs of the two plans. The difference in cost between the plans is currently estimated at \$89,000,000.

The Corps cannot proceed with this important hurricane protection study until a tentative plan is selected for presentation in a draft feasibility report and draft environmental impact statement for coordination with other agencies and the public. The New Orleans District has recently sent a letter to the Pontchartrain Levee District requesting a decision on whether to proceed with the Corps proposed plan, the plan proposed by St. John the Baptist Parish, or to terminate the study.

#### **AMITE RIVER AND TRIBUTARIES, BAYOU MANCHAC WATERSHED**

The Commission appreciates your support of the study to evaluate the flooding and ecosystem restoration in the Bayou

-4-

Manchac watershed and recognizes the need to maintain the project schedule.

The Corps completed the initial screening phase in 2002 and has been developing the Project Management Plan (PMP) for the detailed feasibility phase. The District presented a draft PMP on March 13, 2003. The District plans on finalizing this PMP with you in Fiscal Year 2004 and revising the Feasibility Cost Sharing Agreement as needed. The public scoping meetings are planned for the fall of 2003 and the District anticipates starting the detailed feasibility work in Fiscal Year 2004.

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

Sincerely,

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