

Dear Mr. Keahey:

Thank you for your presentation before the Mississippi River Commission during the public meeting held in Greenville, Mississippi, on August 21, 2001. In your statement you discussed the following items of concern:

a. Expressed satisfaction with the progress on the Sicily Island Levee project and the current schedule for construction of the remaining items.

b. Stated that environmental impacts should be considered during construction of a project but should not be the controlling factor in determining the feasibility of the project and also expressed support for "avoid and minimize" techniques being used by the Corps.

c. Stated that your levee district's main emphasis is the Ouachita River as it relates to completion of the remaining levee enlargement items and requested support for funding this project. You also emphasized the need for a bank stabilization program.

d. Requested that the Vicksburg District advise how to prevent degradation of Mississippi River and Tributaries drainage channels in your levee district.

e. Stressed the need to bring the main-line levee system up to design grade and section.

Construction is currently underway on Levee Items 1C and 1D of the Sicily Island Levee project. In addition, the Vicksburg District awarded the construction contract for the Billys and Falcon Bayous plugs on August 10, 2001. This is the last construction contract. Based on current construction schedules, the District should complete the Sicily Island Area project in April 2002, barring unforeseen delays.

As discussed in the past, both flood damage reduction and environmental needs are considered in the formulation and planning of Corps projects. The Corps seeks to balance these competing needs for the public good. In doing so, the Corps incorporates measures to avoid or minimize environmental impacts associated with the project. Compensatory mitigation measures are recommended to offset significant remaining environmental losses. This approach has been used on the Sicily Island project.

The Vicksburg District recently identified one remaining drainage structure under the West Monroe floodwall which is in need of rehabilitation. Design of that repair is currently underway and will be completed in May 2002. Advertisement for construction of the rehabilitation is planned for June 2002.

After many years of working with your agency, the Corps appreciates the need for completion of the Ouachita River Levees, Louisiana, project. The remaining unfunded items of work include levee enlargement of Items 2 and 3 in the Bastrop to Monroe reach of the east bank levee and resurfacing of the Monroe to Sandy Bayou reach of the east bank levee. While no funds were included in the President's Budget for Fiscal Year 2002, the Senate Report included \$1.5 million for the continuation of these items. In addition, consideration will be given to your request for funds to complete this project in future budget cycles. As you are probably aware, receipt of funds will ultimately be based upon national funding priorities.

The Corps does not have general authority for bank stabilization on the Ouachita River. The Corps does have the authority to study the bank stabilization needs and assess the magnitude of these needs. However, there is insufficient funding for such a study. The Senate Report for Fiscal Year 2002 included \$100,000 for a study to "assess bank caving

locations . . . and to prepare an evaluation report identifying and prioritizing the most critical locations." If funding is received, the Corps will initiate the study.

The Tensas Basin Levee District has an aggressive channel maintenance program. The effectiveness of this program is constrained by the expense of mechanical maintenance and the limitations of chemical maintenance. The Vicksburg District will continue to investigate and evaluate maintenance options and techniques to assist the levee boards in providing cost-effective maintenance.

The Corps is also concerned with the Mississippi River levees in the Fifth Louisiana Levee District that remain below the grade necessary to safely pass the project design flood. The Vicksburg District is working to raise the lowest levee sections in northeast Louisiana. Contracts have recently been awarded on two items south of Lake Providence, Louisiana. With the award of these two items, all levee enlargements in East Carroll Parish are either complete or under construction. In addition, the District has another 19 miles of levee in Madison Parish under design.

Thank you again for your presentation. The Commission appreciates receiving your views and will be pleased to hear from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

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