

Dear Mr. Lamensdorf:

Thank you for your presentation before the Mississippi River Commission during the public meeting in Vicksburg, Mississippi, on March 6, 2002. In your statement you discussed flooding in the Delta during the winter of 2001-2002, and the importance of completing Federal water resource projects such as the Upper Yazoo projects, Upper Steele Bayou project, and Mississippi River Levee Enlargement Project, and initiating construction of the Yazoo Backwater Project.

In regard to the flooding this past winter, preventing the need to evacuate the Belzoni hospital and nursing home due to floodwaters has been a priority. The Corps and personnel from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) met with officials from the City of Belzoni, Humphreys County Board of Supervisors, and the hospital administrator earlier this year concerning flooding around the hospital and nursing home. The Corps discussed specific programs for flood abatement and a possible alternative that was offered by the NRCS. They agreed that the plan presented by the NRCS would be a better alternative for those affected by recent flooding. Hence, city and county officials decided to work with NRCS regarding this matter.

The Commission shares your desires to continue and complete the projects located in the Yazoo Basin and the Mississippi River Levees projects as soon as possible. The Corps is committed to answering environmental challenges by providing projects dedicated to sustaining the environment while giving full consideration to flood damage reduction for residents of the Delta. The Corps remains committed to executing these projects to the fullest extent consistent with the appropriations contained in the Federal budget each year.

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We all share in the success of the Upper Steele Bayou project. A team effort was required to overcome the many challenges encountered in completing flood reduction for the Greenville area.

The Vicksburg District has worked with the Mississippi Levee Board and South Delta Flood Control Committee in several consensus-building sessions to help formulate the best plan for the Yazoo Backwater area. The District has selected a combination plan that includes a 14,000 cubic feet per second pump which will initiate pumping at elevation 87 feet, National Geodetic Vertical Datum, and a non-structural flood damage reduction component that includes purchase of 62,500 acres of conservation easements from willing sellers. This plan results in a net increase to the wetland, aquatic, and terrestrial resources in the area. However, the Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service still oppose the project along with many national environmental groups as we heard in the public meeting.

The Corps is continuing with design and real estate activities for Items 1 and 2 for the Big Sunflower River maintenance project. Plans are essentially complete for Item 4. Maintenance contracts will be awarded when environmental documentation is complete, pending availability of funds and water quality certification.

Thank you again for your comments before the Commission. We appreciate 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, Mississippi River
Commission