

Dear Mr. Lamensdorf:

Thank you for the statement made on your behalf by Mr. Clark Carter during the public meeting of the Mississippi River Commission held in Greenville, Mississippi, on April 9, 2003. A copy of this letter is being sent to Mr. Carter. In your statement you referenced the strong opposition by environmental groups to projects constructed in the Yazoo Basin. You reported that these organizations allege that U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects have destroyed the environment, that the Yazoo Backwater Project will destroy 200,000 acres of wetlands, and that mitigation requirements are not current.

Some of the concerns expressed by environmental groups over the Yazoo Backwater Project may stem from misinformation or a lack of being informed. In order to ensure that the information being used by the Corps is accurate and that there is "no net loss" of wetland functional values in the Yazoo Backwater area, the Vicksburg District undertook an additional wetlands assessment of the project area. Personnel from the Corps Engineer Research and Development Center conducted field studies in the project area in support of this additional assessment.

This latest assessment established that under existing conditions there are 166,500 acres of jurisdictional wetlands in the project area. Implementation of the recommended plan would reduce these jurisdictional wetlands by approximately 24,500 acres to 142,050 acres. Although the 24,500 acres will lose their jurisdictional status as wetlands under the

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recommended plan, they will continue to flood on a 2-year frequency and will provide wetland resource values to the basin.

The Environmental Protection Agency and the Vicksburg District are conducting a random validation of the assessment's findings. We anticipate that this work will resolve many of the wetland concerns raised by the September 2000 draft Reformulation Report and draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

The Vicksburg District is meeting mitigation requirements ahead of the construction schedule for all projects in the Yazoo Basin. Over 1,000 additional acres have been purchased for the Upper Steele Bayou and Upper Yazoo projects since the January 14, 2003, update that you enclosed with your testimony. These mitigation properties will be managed to promote natural ecosystems providing additional quality habitat to wildlife in the Delta.

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

We appreciate receiving your views and will be pleased to hear from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

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

Carter's Address:

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