

Dear Mr. Sullivan:

Thank you for the presentation by Mr. Doug Daigle of your office before the Mississippi River Commission during our public meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, on April 6, 2001. Mr. Daigle discussed the issue of hypoxia in the northern Gulf of Mexico and the need for a national task force to deal with nutrient loading in the Mississippi River Basin. Mr. Daigle also submitted for the record a copy of your statement regarding concerns about the Yazoo Backwater project in the lower Mississippi Delta.

The Corps of Engineers shares the concerns of the Mississippi River Basin Alliance regarding the hypoxic conditions seen in the northern Gulf of Mexico. The Corps has been coordinating with other agencies to formulate a draft action plan for reducing, mitigating, and controlling hypoxia. To date, no funding has been appropriated for this effort, but the Corps looks forward to initiating work in the future when funds are made available.

We understand the importance of sustaining the environment in regard to the ongoing Yazoo Backwater project. The Corps has worked diligently with customers and stakeholders to find a solution for the Yazoo Backwater Area that addresses both economic and environmental needs of the lower Delta. The Corps has spent several years in a consensus-building process among environmental agencies and economic interests in the Mississippi Delta. The Yazoo Backwater project was formulated to provide a plan of environmental preservation and enhancement while giving equal consideration to flood damage reduction for Delta residents.

The proposed project would not change the flood patterns on the 62,500 acres of cropland or the 142,000 acres of bottomland hardwoods in the 1-year floodplain. These lands would continue

to experience some flooding as they have in the past. The Federal government would purchase conservation easements from willing sellers on these 62,500 acres of cropland and where these easements are purchased, the agricultural land would be reforested. Studies have shown that terrestrial resources would increase 17 percent, wetland resources would increase 23 percent, and aquatic resources would increase 19 percent. However, waterfowl resources would decrease 42 percent. The waterfowl decrease is the result of a reduction in foraging habitat with the reforestation of agricultural lands. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has indicated that the reforestation of agricultural lands is more important to waterfowl than the loss of foraging habitat since sufficient foraging habitat would remain in the area.

Thank you again for the comments by Mr. Daigle and for your statement submitted for the record of the Commission hearing. 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 Designee, Mississippi  
River Commission