

Dear Mr. Wanamaker:

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 presented the following items of concern:

a. Strongly urged that the Vicksburg District purchase all aggregate materials using "cubic yards" as the method of payment for maintenance gravel on the main-line Mississippi River Levees. You also discussed the status of levee slides located in your district.

b. Discussed progress on main-line levee enlargement projects.

c. Expressed appreciation for the Vicksburg District's repair of the Shell Lake/Clear Creek structure.

d. Stated that your board has continued to generate support for the Yazoo Backwater project and that you look forward to a report being out for final review soon.

e. Discussed real estate activities on the Big Sunflower River maintenance project and pledged full support to expedite construction at the earliest possible date.

f. Discussed progress on your Public Information Program.

The Vicksburg District is using cubic yards as the measurement for both sand-clay gravel and crushed stone. Bids were received for the levee surfacing materials supply contract;

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however, a protest was filed relative to restrictions that the stone be crushed. The Vicksburg District is currently in the process of formulating a position on this matter. With regard to levee slides, the District has begun site investigations and anticipate beginning repairs in early summer.

The Mississippi River Levee enlargement and berm construction is progressing well. Construction is 96 percent

complete on Item 502-L. The contractor will begin turfing this spring on this item with final acceptance dependent on how quickly turfing is established. Item 496-L is 83 percent complete and ahead of schedule. As you are aware, the contractor has completed the dredging for the berms. The remaining work includes removing the retention dikes and spreading the soil over the sand berms to bring the existing levee up to final section, turfing, and graveling the road. We are also working to finalize plans on Item 477-L. Award of this item during Fiscal Year 2002 is contingent on receipt of right-of-way.

The Commission appreciates your assistance in the joint efforts by your board and the Vicksburg District to repair the Shell Lake water control structure. This coordination is a shining example of a successful partnership to provide timely repairs to a key public facility.

The tour your board provided of the Yazoo Backwater area last year enabled the Commission members to see for ourselves the need for the project and allowed us to hear from the citizens about the hardships they have endured because of this flooding. Your board, along with the South Delta Flood Control Committee, should continue to educate the citizens and elected officials about the problems and needs of the 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.

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The Commission appreciates the efforts of the Board of Mississippi Levee Commissioners in acquiring rights-of-way for the Big Sunflower River maintenance project. I understand

that the rights-of-way package, including the appraisal, was provided to you on the day of our Commission public meeting in Vicksburg. We look forward to working as partners to complete maintenance on the Big Sunflower River to reduce flooding such as that which occurred this fall and winter.

The Commission commends the Board of Mississippi Levee Commissioners on its Public Information Program. The Corps reviewed the Project Information Program pamphlets during preparation and found them to be an excellent public information tool. Congratulations on the Addie Award for Best of Show video by Delta Advertising Federation.

The Commission has long stressed the need to inform the public regarding Corps projects. The efforts by your board are excellent, and we hope other boards will do the same. The Corps cannot tell the story as you can. Your board knows what these projects mean to the citizens of the Mississippi Delta who often take flood control for granted until their homes get flooded. We realize public information takes time and money, but getting this message to the people must be done.

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