



News Release

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MRC High-Water Trip Report # 3

On Board the Motor Vessel Mississippi, April 9, 2003 – Emphasizing the key Mississippi River Commission Theme that “A comprehensive plan and solutions to the Mississippi watershed,” Brig. Gen. Don T. Riley, president-designee of the Mississippi River Commission, opened the third public meeting of the 365th session of the MRC at Greenville, Miss.

This High Water Inspection Trip is an opportunity for the commission to meet with concerned citizens, stakeholders and partners along the lower Mississippi River to hear their concerns and receive input and feedback from the public who attend the four scheduled Public Meetings held along the river.

“Let me make sure you know that our approach will have no pre-determined solutions,” said Riley in his opening comments to those assembled at the meeting on board the MV Mississippi. “We’re not going to say OK, we’ll build you a levee. We’re going to study the problem and give you a balanced solution.

“That process is easier said than done.”

Riley went on to emphasize that when partnering with stakeholders in projects, the Mississippi River Commission and Corps of Engineers has a responsibility to bring a holistic approach to the table by looking at cumulative impacts up and down the river. One of the flagship goals echoed throughout this inspection trip of the Mississippi River Commission is that the MRC and Corps is listening to hear concerns about the river, the projects and the Mississippi Valley. All commissioners agree that the Mississippi river is both a nationally significant ecosystem and a nationally significant navigation system.

One of the first speakers to bring this point home after a project update of the Vicksburg District by Col. Frederick Clapp was Mrs. Ruby Johnson, representing the South Delta Flood Control Commission. Mrs. Johnson made it quite clear on her support of the Yazoo Back Water Project that has gained national attention as a cause for some environmental groups.

“I’m here before you again today begging for what we need,” said Johnson. “We The People have formed a group – we must work closely together – and we have over the last three years.

“I want to tell all of those people who think we don’t need this project that they don’t need to fight the Levee Board. They don’t need to fight the Corps of Engineers. They don’t need to fight the Delta Association. They need to come down and fight us!”

Mrs. Johnson pointed out to the Commission that she lives right in the middle of the flood zone and found it amazing that most of those folks complaining about the impacts on the environment could make a statement about the Yazoo Project and not even come for a tour. Commissioner Sam Angel offered Johnson words of support.

“You are correct when you say that many people that oppose the need for the Yazoo Backwater Pump Project do not live and work in the area,” said Angel. He went onto praise Ms. Johnson in his closing statement and promised continued support for the project.

Mr. Clark Carter, vice-president of the Delta Council went on to emphasize Johnson’s position with his presentation.

“Claims made by the Environmental Lobby regarding the Yazoo Backwater Project can’t be substantiated,” Carter said. “The claim of 200,000 acres of wetlands destruction posted on their websites is erroneous.” Carter went on to request the Mississippi River Commission challenge those claims.

Mr. Jim Wanamaker, chairman of the Mississippi Levee Board was equally supportive of the Yazoo Backwater Project.

“I can not thank the people of the Yazoo Backwater South Delta area enough,” said Wanamaker. “They have worked tirelessly for this effort.”

Wanamaker went on to express concerns regarding the USACE 2012 Project to restructure the Corps of Engineers, and requested the Commission to carry forward the Mississippi Levee Board's concerns that their public interest and stakeholder comments be included in the final USACE 2012 product.

Although flood control and its environmental impacts was a key ingredient of Wednesday's hearing, the Commission heard quite extensive testimony on recreational project concerns from several partnership groups on the need to assist repair and improvements. The sentiment of recreation interests who provided testimony were summed up Mrs. Dolly Marascalco, a Grenada, Mississippi resident and member of the tourism board and chamber of commerce, addressing the Commission about Grenada Lake.

"The difference between the Corps of Engineers and other Federal Agencies, is you can truly see your tax dollars at work," said Marascalco.

Thursday's agenda for the Commission includes briefings on several critical projects in Louisiana, including the Louisiana Coastal Area, or LCA project on the restoration of the coast. The Commission will conclude its inspection trip Friday with a public hearing schedule in New Orleans.