



News Release

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Corps signs Record of Decision approving revised floodway supplemental environmental impact statement

VICKSBURG, Miss., May 23, 2006 — Brigadier General Robert Crear, Commander of the Mississippi Valley Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, signed a Record of Decision (ROD) today, approving the Final Revised Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement No. 2 (RSEIS 2) for the St. John's Bayou and New Madrid Floodway Project. The ROD completes the Corps' requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act and will allow the Corps, through the Memphis District, to resume the construction phase of the project.

The St. John's Bayou and New Madrid Floodway Project represents an intense effort by the Corps to address ecological and environmental concerns, while also reducing regional personal and economic suffering caused by frequent agricultural and urban flooding.

"This project is now the best solution for the people and the environment," General Crear said, after having delayed the Record of Decision for almost a year to ensure environmental concerns were adequately addressed.

The Corps coordinated with the Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Missouri Department of Natural Resources and Missouri Department of Conservation to add innovative measures to address concerns regarding environmental impacts.

The plan will preserve the old growth bottomland hardwood forest in the Big Oak Tree State Park by providing a source of Mississippi River water for seasonal flooding. The plan also includes purchasing adjacent lands to enlarge the park.

"This plan will protect the characteristics that make the park unique and will expand the park's footprint," General Crear said.

Following the filing of a Revised Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement in July 2002 (2002 RSEIS), concerns and issues were raised regarding the project and the adequacy of mitigation. The RSEIS 2 re-examined these concerns and issues and provided clarification on and corrected inconsistencies in the 2002 RSEIS. The revised plan retains flood damage reduction and basic mitigation features presented in the 2002 RSEIS. The 2002 RSEIS mitigation features would have compensated for all significant unavoidable impacts from the project except for mid-season fish rearing impacts in the New Madrid Floodway.

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In the RSEIS 2, techniques that supplement the basic mitigation features and compensate for all remaining impacts to mid-season fish rearing habitat in the New Madrid Floodway were added. These techniques include additional reforested farmland within the St. John's Bayou basin, New Madrid Floodway, or batture areas; increased flooding on reforested areas from April 1 to May 15; creation, restoration, or enhancement of large or small water bodies in the floodplain; and creation of a fish spawning and rearing pool by modifying the operation of outlet gates to hold water during the April 1 to May 15 period.

In explaining his decision, General Crear stated: "The carefully designed alternative selected provides the people of the St. John's and New Madrid area with the long-awaited flood control benefits authorized by Congress, while also capturing the environmentally preferable plan. The project will result in a net benefit to the resources of the region and should improve water quality and regional resources for the benefit of citizens, waterfowl, migratory birds, wildlife and forests."

The RSEIS 2 also provides for changes in the operation of the project's water control structures which will continue to allow a connection between the Mississippi River and the New Madrid Floodway during the critical spring fish reproductive period by leaving the flood control gates open during certain ranges of river stages until mid-May. The plan also allows for gate management when river stages fall to below damage levels in the spring to hold water needed to allow completion of an effective fisheries spawn. In some of the drier years, the gate management approach can provide for the inundation of up to 2,000 more acres of forested and farmed lands in the lower Floodway than would occur in previous designs, thereby reducing impacts to wetlands and fish.

Additional habitat improvement measures will provide vegetative buffer strips up to 100-feet-wide, along 64 miles of stream and channels in the Floodway. These strips benefit the surface water by providing shade and structure, and filtering runoff. Constructing in-stream structures for larger channels in the Floodway and the St. John's Bayou basin will also enhance fish habitat. Planting a vegetative corridor between Big Oak Tree State Park and the Ten-Mile Pond Wildlife Conservation Area will enhance wildlife habitat.

A minimum of 8,384 acres of mitigation lands will be purchased — more than doubling the bottomland hardwoods in the project area. These reforested lands will also increase wildlife habitat and provide important wetland functions for the region's overall ecology. To further compensate for fisheries impacts, the Corps will purchase or obtain easements on 387 to 1,087 additional acres for creation or enhancement of borrow pits and floodplain lakes. The Corps will purchase the mitigation lands from willing sellers. The Fish and Wildlife Service and the Missouri Department of Conservation will assist the Corps in identifying areas that would be suitable for purchase.

The St. John's Bayou and New Madrid Floodway Project seeks balance among human development activities and natural systems by providing an environmentally sustainable solution.

"The Corps is proud to be part of a national team of Federal, State, local and private organizations dedicated to meeting the Nation's needs," General Crear added. "This project strikes the balance and serves the citizens of Missouri and the Nation."