



Mississippi River Commission

Executive Summary of Testimony
403rd Session
August 24 – August 26, 2020



Mississippi River & Tributaries Project

Authority

Designation of Functions and Agencies for the Execution of the Mississippi River Flood Control Project Adopted by the Act approved May 15, 1928.

1) Section 8 of the Flood Control Act approved May 15, 1928 reads as follows:

“The project herein authorized shall be prosecuted by the Mississippi River Commission under the direction of the Secretary of War and supervision of the Chief of Engineers and subject to the provisions of this act. It shall perform such functions and through such agencies as they shall designate after consultation and discussion with the president of the commission. For all other purposes the existing laws governing the constitution and activities of the commission shall remain unchanged. The commission shall make inspection trips of such frequency and duration as will enable it to acquire first-hand information as to conditions and problems germane to the matter of flood control within the area of its jurisdiction; and on such trips of inspection ample opportunity for hearings and suggestions shall be afforded persons affected by or interested in such problems. The president of the commission shall be the executive officer thereof.”

2) After consultation and discussion with the President of the Mississippi River Commission, in accordance with the law set forth above, the following functions and agencies of the Mississippi River Commission, in connection with the execution of flood control work in the Mississippi Valley, hereby designated by the Secretary of War and the Chief of Engineers:

- (a) Making the inspection trips and holding the public hearings described under Section 8 of the Act approved May 15, 1928.
- (b) Recommendation of the policy for the development of the details of the project adopted by law.
- (c) Recommendation of the policy for carrying out the work under the adopted project.
- (d) Consideration and recommendation of the general character and types of work to be used in construction under the adopted project.
- (e) Recommendation annually of the program of work to be undertaken during the following fiscal year.
- (f) Recommendations upon any matters authorized by law.
- (g) The executive officer of the Commission and Engineer Districts of the Mississippi Valley are designated as agencies for carrying out the project.



Executive Summary

Proceedings 403rd Session August 24 – August 26, 2020

The Mississippi River Commission (MRC) has a proud heritage that dates back to June 28, 1879, when Congress established the seven-member presidentially appointed commission with the mission to transform the Mississippi River into a reliable commercial artery while protecting adjacent towns and fertile agricultural lands from destructive floods. Following the devastating 1927 Flood, Congress authorized the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) project and charged the MRC with overseeing the prosecution of the project. As part of this responsibility, Congress required the commission to conduct annual inspection trips, which were to include public hearings and inspections of features of the MR&T project. For 92 years, the commission has conducted these annual inspection trips aboard the Motor Vessel Mississippi, once during the high-water season and once during the low-water season.

The commission held its 403rd Session from August 24-August 26, 2020, with public meetings in Caruthersville, Mo., and Greenville, Miss. The commission intended to hold four public meetings and inspect 540 miles of the Mississippi River from Caruthersville, Mo., to the Old River Control Complex, as well as 99 miles of the Atchafalaya River. However, the commission had to cancel two of its scheduled public meetings. The Memphis public meeting scheduled for August 25 was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The commission had to cancel the last two days of the trip as well as the public meeting scheduled for August 28 in Morgan City, La., due to hurricanes Marco and Laura. The back-to-back hurricanes made landfall during the early morning of Tuesday, August 25 (Marco) and overnight on Thursday, August 27 (Laura). At the request of Lt. Gen. Todd Semonite, Chief of Engineers, Maj. Gen. Diana Holland departed for Baton Rouge on August 25 to meet with the Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards and the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness on August 26. In Maj. Gen. Holland's absence, Hon. Dr. Norma Jean Mattei served as acting president of the commission during the Greenville public meeting.

This was also the first session since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the commission had to cancel the previously scheduled 403rd session in the spring due to the Center for Disease Control's and local governments' restrictions on public gatherings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. On the inspection trip, the commission mandated strict social distancing guidelines to minimize the risk to partners, the commission, the staff and crew members. No more than 30 people were allowed in the public hearing room at a time, including the commission and its staff. Consequently, only partners providing testimony were allowed on the vessel and audience membership was restricted.

The purpose of the commission's inspection trip process is to maintain a consistent connection - an exchange of viewpoints and ideas among the public, partners, stakeholders, elected officials, the Mississippi River Commission, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and agencies from the private, state and federal sectors. This process provides a greater voice for those who live and work in the region to shape federal management and policy of the river. The following proceedings are a summary of the testimony provided at the public hearings, as well as a summary of the site visits and inspections conducted during the session. Twenty-four partners spoke before the commission and provided formal written testimony. Another 24 partners filed formal statements for the record, electronically. The audio, transcripts, formal written testimony and commission's written responses are held on file at the Mississippi River Commission Headquarters in Vicksburg, Miss.

Charles A. Camillo
Executive Director
Mississippi River Commission



Purpose & Objectives

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Purpose

The intent behind the Mississippi River Commission inspection trips, carried out under the authority of Section 8 of the 1928 Flood Control Act, is two-fold:

1. Site visits and inspections provide the commission with a boots-on-the-ground understanding through the inspection of key MR&T project features that convey floods or facilitate commerce. Likewise, the commission visits public infrastructure, businesses and other enterprises from the transportation, agriculture, manufacturing, commerce and energy sectors that benefit from flood control and navigation improvements. Through this process, the commission is able to meet with local sponsors and entrepreneurs and gain a deeper understanding of the impacts of federal investments and engineering improvements on local, regional and national economies.
2. Public meetings and partnering sessions allow stakeholders, partners and members of the public to meet with the commission to discuss local and regional concerns related to the MR&T project and other flood control, navigation and water resources challenges. The commission uses the knowledge gained to foster a better understanding of the needs of the region, to improve the management of the watershed and to inform policymakers.

Objectives for the 403rd Session

GOAL 1: Allow the public to share their concerns through public testimony and through the submission of formal written statements. Through this process, commission members hear first-hand accounts from those people impacted and develop a dialogue centered on providing solutions for the challenges facing the region. The commission responds publicly to questions and provides formal written responses to each speaker. This democratic process allows the commission to inform policy makers and determine key regional issues.

GOAL 2: Demonstrate that the execution of the MR&T Program continues despite the ongoing pandemic. While using accepted safety protocols and social distancing measures, conduct face-to-face discussions, site visits and presentations that provide the commission and staff with the opportunity to meet with stakeholders, partners and the public on a more intimate and personal level. Through this process, the commission is able to gain a better understanding of the needs of the region so that these needs can be better communicated to key leaders and policy makers to improve the management of the watershed.



Top Regional Issues

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Yazoo Backwater Flooding and Pump Project: Summary of Testimony

The Yazoo Backwater Area experienced record flooding in 2019 that placed 550,000 acres underwater, including 250,000 acres of farmland and 515 homes and businesses. Farmers were unable to plant crops and residents of one of the poorest regions in the entire country were economically devastated. The flooding also damaged trees, wildlife and the environment, as the carcasses of dead animals were strewn about the flooded lands and forests of critical bottomland hardwood were severely damaged or even killed. The area flooded once again in 2020 with approximately 500,000 acres inundated. Residents who had not yet recovered from last year's flood once again faced the prospect of economic devastation. The flooding also spilled over into the adjacent Eagle lake area, where the Muddy Bayou structure which normally prevents the Yazoo backwater from backing into Eagle Lake was overtopped. Eagle Lake residents are now flooded from both sides, all of which would have been preventable if the authorized pumps were in place.

The people who live and work in the Yazoo Backwater Area overwhelmingly support the completion of the pump project. The commission heard numerous testimonies from people who live and work in the region describing the real-life impacts of the flood. Most of these testimonies contain stories from individuals, families and businesses describing how they have been personally impacted by flooding and all expressed strong support for the pump project.

Without the pump project, the Backwater Area remains subject to serious flooding every year. If the pump project were in place in 2019, backwater flood elevations would have been nearly six feet lower and flooding would have been prevented on approximately 200,000 acres, including 122,000 acres of crop land. The pumps also would have prevented the majority of homes from being flooded and no highways would have been inundated. The pump project also would have provided critical habitat for the wildlife trying to survive during the flood. Instead, 231,000 acres of crop land were not planted in 2019, major roads and highways were underwater, and 686 homes were flooded. On June 13, 2019, two people drowned trying to turn around in the Backwater Area near Holly Bluff. The wildlife population and the environment were decimated. In 2020, the flooding repeated, as 500,000 acres flooded, including 202,000 acres of crop land which farmers could not plant.

Of the four backwater areas within the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project, Congress authorized pumps for all four. To date, only the Yazoo pump remains unconstructed. In 2007, the Vicksburg District completed its report on the pump project, but the EPA vetoed the project in 2008. Since then, the area has flooded nine of the last 10 years. The commission has strongly supported the Corps of Engineers' request for the EPA to reconsider its veto. The Vicksburg District is currently updating the 2007 environmental documentation for the project with new data gathered over the last decade. The district and commission have also been working vigilantly with its partners to complete the SEIS and construction on the pump project, meeting with Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves, Mississippi's congressional delegation and the EPA. The Vicksburg District is scheduled to complete its environmental and economic analysis by mid-September 2020, and the Corps of Engineers is working towards having a final document in early 2021.



Top Regional Issues

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Interior Drainage and Ditch Cleanout: Summary of Testimony

Our partners throughout the lower Mississippi Valley request funding for maintenance and repair of drainage ditches in order to maximize the benefits of the MR&T.

The Mississippi River Alluvial Valley consists of 24 million acres of the most fertile agricultural lands in the world. These lands are crisscrossed by thousands of miles of drainage ditches that transport the runoff from the lower Mississippi Valley into the tributaries of the Mississippi River and ultimately into the Mississippi itself. The drainage ditches act as an interconnected system that provides interior flood protection for the lands protected by the Mississippi River mainline levee system. Proper performance of the interior drainage system is essential for maximizing the protection offered by the Mississippi River mainline levees. The interior drainage system transports runoff away from developed areas and agricultural lands and into the main drainage channels, and ultimately into the Mississippi River. If this drainage system includes blockages or inefficient channels, the water backs up, flooding the very lands the MR&T system is designed to protect. For the MR&T to function as designed, interior drainage must be maintained and must be recognized as a part of the system.

Because of the lack of maintenance in these drainage ditches, the benefits of the Federal investment in the MR&T Project are reduced. Improvement of the interior drainage through bank stabilization, removal of blockages, and increased channel capacity maximizes the benefits of the Federal investment in the MR&T levee system and other improvements. The MR&T is a system and to fully realize the maximum benefits of the system the Corps of Engineers must properly maintain drainage ditches.

Groundwater Sustainability: Summary of Testimony

Our partners support having water supply and groundwater sustainability added as a Corps of Engineers mission or as a project mission. The Alluvial and Sparta Aquifers supply groundwater to thousands of people in eastern Arkansas, northern Louisiana, and portions of Missouri, Mississippi and Tennessee. This includes drinking water, as well as water to support agriculture and industry. Until the late 1990s, local communities used groundwater from these aquifers for industry and drinking water. In agricultural areas, irrigated crops such as rice require significant volumes of water to grow it efficiently. Although rice farmers use all the surface and runoff water they can capture and reuse this same water over and over through tail water recovery systems, this supply of water is not sufficient for the irrigation of rice. To meet the total demand, they have to withdraw significant volumes of groundwater at a rate that is not sustainable to the aquifer in many areas. One such project, which includes not only protection to the aquifer from over pumping, but also flood control and environmental restoration, is the Bayou Meto Project in Arkansas. The customer for this project is seeking Federal Appropriations to advance construction on this project.

In other areas, the declining groundwater levels have been slowed by reducing the reliance on groundwater and instead utilizing improved irrigation techniques and diverting water from nearby streams. As a result of these efforts, groundwater levels have risen 109 feet since 2004 at one well in Union County, Arkansas. Our partners have requested the commission's continued support for projects to restore the depleted aquifers and for water supply and groundwater sustainability to be added as a Corps of Engineers mission.

Our partners are currently working with their congressional delegation to have WRDA 2020 include water supply as a project purpose for the Ouachita-Black Navigation Project. Irrigation for agricultural use continues to grow as an evolving use of the river. Thousands of acres of agricultural fields are becoming more and more dependent upon Ouachita River water for irrigation. Irrigation greatly increases the value of the agricultural commodity product at harvest, as well as creating jobs and producing economic growth in the region. Our partners requested the commission's continued support for adding groundwater as a mission for this project as well as for making water supply a mission for the Corps of Engineers.



Top Regional Issues

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Agricultural Impacts of Flooding: Summary of Testimony

Recent flooding has had devastating impacts on agriculture throughout the valley, with damages from the 2019 Flood causing an estimated \$20 billion in damages throughout the Mississippi River watershed and billions more in damages from the 2020 Flood. Flooding has become so commonplace for our partners that flooding now dictates their planting decision and some years it even hinders the ability to plant at all, significantly impacting the livelihood of farmers throughout the valley. As flooding continues to increase in both frequency and duration, many farmers are so burdened that they are on the verge of going out of business.

The frequency of flooding has also caused federal crop insurance rates to skyrocket for farmers, placing further economic burdens on them. Premium rates are now so high in many areas, that they are cost prohibitive, forcing many farmers to go without crop insurance. Back-to-back flooding in 2019 and 2020 has also damaged the farmer's yield history, preventing federal crop insurance from working to mitigate the risk from river flooding. The Mississippi Farm Bureau has been working with their congressional delegations and the USDA-Risk Management Agency on a study to find short-term relief until a longer-term strategy can be developed. Our partners request the commission's support for this study.

As many of our partners have pointed out, these floods were not inevitable natural disasters but were rather preventable. If the Yazoo Backwater Pumps were in place, hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland would not have been flooded and farmers would not have been prevented from planting hundreds of thousands of acres. In other areas, if interior drainage improvements had been funded and completed, hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland would not have been flooded.

For most of these farmers, their economic survival depends on being able to plant on time and harvest crops every year. But the impacts go far beyond this, as the agriculture produced in the Mississippi valley adds up to trillions of calories worth of crops that feed hundreds of millions of people throughout the world. Without flood protection, none of this is possible, the food necessary to feed hundreds of millions of people would be lost. Our partners requested that the commission continue to support reducing the devastating impacts of flooding through investment in the MR&T system and flood control projects throughout the valley.



Commission Members

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Mississippi River Commission Members as of August 24, 2020



Maj. Gen. Diana Holland
President
Appointed June 30, 2020



Hon. Dr. Norma Jean Mattei,
PhD, Civil Engineer
Appointed Dec. 3, 2012



Rear Adm. Shepard Smith
NOAA
Appointed Jan. 3, 2017



Hon. James Reeder
Civil Engineer
Appointed May 17, 2018



Maj. Gen. Robert Whittle
Military Member
Appointed July 12, 2019



Brig. Gen. Peter Helmlinger
Military Member
Appointed July 23, 2019



Hon. Riley James
Civilian Member
Appointed March 24, 2020

Mississippi River Commission



Top Left and Right: MRC visits Little River and receives briefings on the role of drainage ditches in reducing flood risk in the area.

SITE VISITS & INSPECTIONS



Left: MRC and local partners from St. Francis Basin levee districts in Missouri pose for photo to celebrate groundbreaking on three critical flood control projects.



Right: MRC joins local partners for ceremony in Kennett, Missouri, to celebrate groundbreaking on critical flood control projects in the St. Francis Basin of Missouri.

MRC visits Ensley Engineer Yard for inspection of Mixed Pumping Unit and demonstration of the access wells used to activate Birds Point-New



Commissioners join Memphis District Commander Col. Zach Miller and district senior leaders to celebrate groundbreaking on critical mainline Mississippi River levee projects in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Levee District.



MRC President Maj. Gen. Holland discusses critical Yazoo-Mississippi Delta mainline levee projects with local partners during groundbreaking ceremony.



Site Visits & Inspections

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Site Visit to Little River Drainage Ditches

On August 24, the commission visited three Little River Drainage Ditch Projects: Lower Ditch 251, Upper 251, and Upper Ditch 1. The projects involve cleaning out the drainage channels to remove blockages and improve the conveyance efficiency of the channels so that they can provide the authorized level of flood protection.

St. Francis Basin Construction Groundbreaking

On August 24, the commission along with 40 partners gathered near Kennett, Missouri, to celebrate the groundbreaking ceremony for three critical flood risk reduction projects in the St. Francis Basin.

- 1) The Below Senath Seepage Remediation Project, in Dunklin County, Missouri, will reduce the risk to the levee due to under-seepage and is scheduled for completion in October 2020.
- 2) The Big Island Seepage Remediation Project in Greene County, Arkansas, will reduce the risk of under-seepage through the construction of two seepage berms as well as ditch cleanout. Work is scheduled for completion in May 2022.
- 3) The combined Below Piggott Seepage Remediation /Below Hwy 90 Channel Cleanout Project in Clay and Greene counties, Arkansas, will provide levee protection and improve flows in the St. Francis River through the construction of seepage berms and the removal of sediment blocking a five-and-a-half mile stretch of river. The project is scheduled for completion July 2023. Together, these three critical projects will reduce flood risk for those who live and work in a major tributary basin within the MR&T Project.

Mixed Pumping Unit and Access Wells Demonstration

On August 25, the commission visited Ensley Engineer Yard where the Memphis District provided a demonstration of the Mixed Pumping Unit and access wells used to activate the Birds Point New Madrid Floodway. The floodway is a critical component of the MR&T Project and is activated to lower stages in the Mississippi-Ohio River confluence area near Cairo, Illinois, and upstream of this area.

Yazoo Mississippi Delta Groundbreaking

The commission traveled to Tunica, Mississippi, to join partners from the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Levee District for the groundbreaking ceremony to celebrate the start of two critical mainline Mississippi River Levee flood risk reduction projects. The Commerce, Mississippi, Seepage Remediation Project consists of a 2,700-foot-long seepage berm and 29 new relief wells. Together, these improvements will reduce seepage and prevent sand boils which could threaten the integrity of the levees. The Clack/Norfolk, Mississippi, Seepage Remediation Project involves the construction of a 2,000-foot-long seepage berm and 31 new relief wells. Both projects are scheduled for completion in January 2022. Once completed, they will reduce flood risk, flood damages, and flood protection costs associated with flooding and high-water events.

Proceedings



Mississippi River Commission



Mississippi River Commission

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Summary of Testimony

Caruthersville, Missouri, Public Hearing on August 24, 2020

12 members of the public present, all of whom provided testimony. MRC members present: MRC President, Maj. Gen. Diana Holland; Hon. Dr. Norma Jean Mattei; Hon. James Reeder; Brig. Gen. Peter Helmlinger; and Hon. Riley James. Not present: Maj. Gen. Robert Whittle and Rear. Adm. Shepard Smith.

9:02 Maj. Gen. Holland called meeting to order. Col. Chapman welcomed guests, explained COVID measures; MRC hearing authorities.

9:06 Maj. Gen. Holland provided opening remarks: value of partnerships; value of the MR&T.

9:12 Col. Zach Miller (Memphis District Commander) gave brief summarizing work done in district.

9:21 Col. Chapman read MRC meeting procedures.

9:23 Hon. Johnny Rye (Arkansas House of Representatives) on behalf of Barbara Lewallen (Mayor of the City of Trumann): Mr. Rye requested federal assistance for a floodplain study to address drainage issues in Ditches 9, 10 and 12 that are causing flooding on the west side of the City of Trumann, Ark. Drainage ditches to the north have been enlarged in response to the growth of Jonesboro, Ark., causing drainage back-ups when the water reaches Ditches 9, 10 and 12.

Formal Written Testimony

9:30 Hon. Greg Terry (Carlisle, Ky., County Judge/Mayor) & Hon. Kenny Wilson (Hickman, Ky., County Judge/Mayor): Mr. Terry and Mr. Wilson requested assistance to halt the continued erosion that threatens historic Columbus-Belmont State Park in Hickman County, Kentucky. The park is located along the bank of the Mississippi River and rapid erosion has occurred due to recent severe flooding.

Formal Written Testimony

9:40 Harry Stephens (Mississippi Valley Flood Control Association): Mr. Stephens requested that the commission support an annual MR&T appropriation of \$500 million and the completion of the MR&T. He also criticized the National Levee Safety Program and requested that ASA(CW) R.D. James and the Corps of Engineers not support the publication of the levee safety review document. Mr. Stephens was also critical of the Federal Flood Insurance Program and the unrealistic standards required by the National Levee Safety Committee. Lastly, he was critical of the WOTUS rule but expressed optimism that the current administration is moving in the right direction on the issue.

Formal Written Testimony

9:50 Wayne Gairhan (Landowner): Mr. Gairhan discussed drainage issues with Ditches 9 in Craighead County, Arkansas, and 10 (Big Bay Ditch) in Poinsett County, Arkansas. There are blockages in these ditches and their capacities are not sufficient to pass the water flowing southward from the Jonesboro area. The blockages are causing flooding in the City of Truman as well as along Hwy 69. A contractor, under contract with the Memphis District, cleaned out a portion of the ditch but Mr. Gairhan stated that the contractor did not complete the work. He requested that the Corps of Engineers cleanout and maintain the ditches.

No Formal Written Testimony Provided



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10:00 Edward Swaim (Bayou Meto Water Management District): Mr. Swaim discussed groundwater depletion in the Sparta and Alluvial aquifers and provided an update on the Bayou Meto Project, which is designed to address this issue. The project cannot be operated until the main canal is finished, many miles of bayous and ditches cleaned out, and the distribution pipelines are built. Memphis District is seeking \$71 million to complete Phase I of the project so that it can deliver water. He asked for continued support of the project and invited the MRC to come for a tour of the area.

[Formal Written Testimony Presentation](#)

10:15 Rob Rash (St. Francis Levee of Arkansas): In Mr. Rash's spoken testimony, he discussed the value of the MR&T system and its levees. He believes that the Levee Safety Action Classification (LSAC) Rating misrepresents the level of protection provided by the MR&T levees. LSAC Ratings can impact economic development and flood insurance rates. Since a levee's risk increases relative to the economic development behind the levee, LSAC scores go down even though the protection provided by the levee remains the same. Mr. Rash stated that this deters investment and drives up flood insurance rates. He asks the Corps of Engineers to stay out of the flood insurance business. In his written testimony, he also discussed the importance of funding the MR&T Project and requested an annual appropriation of \$500 million so that the authorized project can be completed. He also criticized the National Levee Safety Program and the policies contained in the Engineering Circular 1165-2-218 Draft, which he said would impose risk mitigation duties onto local sponsors; the WOTUS rule, which broadly expanded the definition of a wetland/federal waterway and an expansion of 408 permitting; FEMA's mandatory flood insurance; Federal Flood Risk Management Standards, which broadly expand the definition of floodplain and make it virtually impossible to inhabit areas protected by levees.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

10:30 Break

10:45 Dustin Boatwright (Little River Drainage District, Chief Engineer and Ex. Vice Pres.): In his spoken testimony, Mr. Boatwright discussed the history of Little River Drainage District. In his written testimony, he discussed several maintenance issues in the drainage district: Large levee slide/slope stability issue on two sections of the Headwater Diversion Channel Levee; issues with a roadway that provides access to relief wells; riprap armor needed at the junction of Sal's Creek Spur Levee and Ramsey Creek Levee along with the reestablishment of the MR&T level of levee protection; erosion along Ditch Nos. 1 and 290 requires riprap armor; Ditches Nos. 66 and 39 require channel excavation; and bank failure in Ditch No. 66 requires armoring.

[Formal Written Testimony Presentation](#)

10:58 Jimmy Moody (Dyer County Levee and Drainage District No. 1): Mr. Moody discussed the status of the Miston Berm project and the Island 18 rock work; the completion of the MR&T Project; and was critical of the Levee Safety Program.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)



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11:05 Jennifer Sheehan (Arkansas Game and Fish Commission): Mrs. Sheehan discussed recent meetings with the Memphis District and stakeholders in the St. Francis River basin, at which they discussed the development of a more holistic water and habitat management plan for the St. Francis Basin that would allow for more consistent ecosystem management.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

11:09 Jody Simmons (Chairman, St. Francis Drainage District of Clay and Greene Counties, Ark.): Mr. Simmons discussed the channel blockage below the AR Hwy. 90 Bridge, which threatens the integrity of the adjacent and upstream levees. A contract has been awarded to reopen over five miles of channel and to build approximately 10 miles of seepage berm along the mainline levee system. His main concern is that the channel has been cleaned in this same area out twice before over the last 30 years and the blockage keeps recurring. He recommends that the Memphis District develop a long-term plan to address the issue. He also discussed the need for a long-term, system-wide approach to improving the functioning of the entire St. Francis River system as well as the sedimentation issues that cause blockages throughout the system.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

[Presentation](#)

11:30 John Stuckey (Drainage District No. 7): Mr. Stuckey discussed the blockages and need for channel enlargement for Ditches Nos. 9 and 10 near Trumann, Ark. Because of the urban growth of Jonesboro, Ark., to the north, the amount of water flowing southward has increased, causing backups in Ditches Nos. 9 and 10. He requested that the Memphis District conduct a study on bringing Ditch 12 straight to Ditch 10 West of Trumann. He also requested that the Memphis District finish the channel cleanout of Ditch 10 for the portion of the ditch below Hwy 214.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

[Photo Map of Drainage District](#)

11:32 MRC members closing comments

11:41 Meeting adjourned

Filed for the Record

Mayor Bobby Hardrick (Madison, Arkansas): Mr. Hardrick discussed the East Arkansas Enterprise Community. WRDA 2007 authorized \$20 million for the project but no funds have been appropriated as it would require a new start decision. He then discussed \$6 million in work completed using match funds, including work on the Madison Oxidation Ponds to prevent them from contaminating the St. Francis River.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Mayor Allen Latimer (Horn Lake, Mississippi): Mr. Latimer discussed flooding issues around Horn Lake and in DeSoto County caused by Horn Lake Creek. Horn Lake is at the bottom of the area drained by the creek. He requests the Corps of Engineers and commission's continued support for the feasibility study and a project to address this issue.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)



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Rep. Jason Smith (MO-8): Rep. Smith discussed the flood protection in southeast Missouri and the need to invest in the MR&T project, specifically the Commerce to Birds Point Levee, which is aging and requires maintenance. He requested that the commission support placing revetment along the Mississippi River above Cairo, Illinois, and around the Thompson Bend area. He requested that the Corps of Engineers consider allowing the Birds Point-New Madrid Floodway levee to naturally overtop to reduce the possibility of operation. Next, he discussed supplemental funds used to repair seepage along the St. Francis River in Missouri. He also discussed work on the Caruthersville Floodwall, West Basin Levee Scour repairs and the Elk Chute Levee Setback. Next, he discussed the aging pumping stations in Bois Brule and Levee District No. 3 and the need to address these issues in the upcoming WRDA. Lastly, he discussed the Belle Fountain ditch system, which has become clogged with silt and debris as a result of lack of Federal maintenance and asked the Corps of Engineers to evaluate the system.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

David Wade (St. John's Bayou Basin): Mr. Wade discussed the St. John's Bayou Basin New Madrid Floodway Project and the need to install drainage pumps in the basin to remove floodwaters. He discussed the draft Environmental Impact Statement for this project and the Bayou Basin Board's comments. He asked the commission to support for the installation of the authorized pumps.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Mayor Richard Bodi (New Madrid, Missouri): On behalf of the City of New Madrid Mayor Bodi requested assistance to help repair portions of the city's shoreline and city boat ramp that have deteriorated over the years and during the flood of 2019.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Michael Bernard (St. Francis Levee District No. 3): Mr. Bernard discussed work on the Belle Fountain Ditch and the Caruthersville Floodwall. He discussed the blockages in Belle Fountain Ditch and Ditch No. 3 Main 3 and the need to evaluate the ditch and approve a project to address the issue.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Doyle Hicks (Drainage District No. 28): Mr. Doyle requested that the Corps of Engineers clean out four miles of Ditch No. 9 in New Madrid County.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Greenville, Mississippi, Public Hearing on August 26, 2020

12 members of the public present, all of whom provided testimony. MRC members present: Dr. Norma Jean Mattei (served as acting president); Hon. James Reeder; Brig. Gen. Peter Helmlinger; and Hon. Riley James. Not present: MRC President, Maj. Gen. Diana Holland (departed for Louisiana in response to Hurricane Laura); Maj. Gen. Robert Whittle; and Rear. Adm. Shepard Smith.

9:01 Dr. Mattei (Acting MRC President) called meeting to order as Maj. Gen. Holland had to depart for Louisiana in response to Hurricane Laura. Col. Chapman welcomed guests, explained COVID measures; MRC hearing authorities.



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Summary of Testimony

9:05 Dr. Mattei welcomed meeting attendees and provided opening remarks.

9:17 Col. Robert Hilliard (Vicksburg Commander) gave brief summarizing work done in district.

Presentation

9:35 Col. Chapman read MRC meeting procedures

9:37 Paul Hollis (Delta Council): Mr. Hollis requested that the commission support the completion of the Yazoo Headwater Project and the Upper Yazoo Projects (UYP), which would alleviate some of the recent flooding the Delta has experienced. He also requested that the Vicksburg District evaluate and move forward with several proposed structures that are part of the UYP ahead of the channel enlargement features of the projects. Next, he encouraged the Corps to carefully evaluate the current status of the federally-authorized Tributaries projects in the Yazoo Basin, as they require maintenance or have not been completed. He also requested funding for maintenance of the Delta Headwaters Project as well as for the Greenwood District Office and Yazoo River Levee, which is in poor condition. He discussed the need for maintenance funding for the Sunflower River, which has not been funded in 30 years. Lastly, he discussed the recent flooding in the Yazoo Backwater and the need to build the Yazoo Backwater Pump.

Formal Written Testimony

9:51 Ed Landgraf (Coastal and Marine Operators): He discussed marine safety related to dredging and navigation in south Louisiana and along the coast. He discussed a recent incident of a dredge pipeline fire near Corpus Christi that killed four people; there are several other incidents he also discussed. He does not believe there is enough awareness or focus on safety related to marine work near these pipelines. Because of the hazards presented by these pipelines, he recommends the creation of a navigation pipeline database as well as training for members of the dredging and navigation industry to reduce the risk of these accidents. CAMO offers free safety materials and info for industry. He asked the commission to provide advice on how safety can be improved.

Formal Written Testimony

Presentation

10:13 Paige Adcock (Farmer in Holly Bluff, Miss.): She and her family own land in the Yazoo Backwater area. She discussed the impacts of the flooding on her family's land and on the region. She asked the commission and the Corps of Engineers to complete the Yazoo Backwater Pump.

Formal Written Testimony

Presentation

10:19 Cassandra Caldwell (Arkansas Waterways Commission): She discussed funding for navigation improvements for the Arkansas River; progress on the Three River Project; the White River navigation study; the development of Helena Harbor; the Red River navigation feasibility study; and the need for dredging on the Ouachita River.

Formal Written Testimony

10: 30 Break



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10:40 Carol Coletta (Memphis River Park Partnership): Mrs. Coletta discussed the Memphis Riverfront Concept recreational development area and its centerpiece, Tom Lee Park, which is located on a Corps of Engineers project. She requested \$10 million in MR&T funds for O&M of the area, which the Memphis River Parks Partnership, who is the local sponsor, would match. She also said that her organization will be seeking \$10 million under Corps recreation authority and a Section 1135 Ecosystem Restoration project for the park.

[Formal Written Testimony
Presentation](#)

10:55 Ann Dahl (Eagle Lake, Miss., Resident): Mrs. Dahl lives in the Eagle Lake area and discussed recent flooding in the Yazoo Backwater Area. She discussed how the Muddy Bayou Structure is connected to water levels in the Yazoo Backwater and how the Muddy Bayou structure cannot be opened when the Yazoo Backwater levels are higher than the water levels in Eagle Lake. This leads Eagle Lake to fill up and causes flooding. She supports finishing the Yazoo pump project.

[Formal Written Testimony
Presentation](#)

11:04 Victoria Darden (Farmer from Onward, Miss.): Mrs. Darden and her family live in the Yazoo Backwater Area. She discussed the recent flooding and tells stories of the real-life impacts it had on her family and their land. She supports the completion of Yazoo pump project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

11:12 Mike McCormick (Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation): Mr. McCormick discussed the flooding in the Yazoo Backwater over the last decade and its impact on local farmers. He expressed support for the SEIS for the Yazoo pump and supported building the pump. He also discussed flooding of the batture land on the unprotected side of the levee and requested a plan to reduce flooding on the Mississippi River batture land.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

11:19 Peter Nimrod (Chief Engineer, Board of Mississippi Levee Commissioners): Mr. Nimrod discussed the need to complete the MR&T Project. Next, he discussed progress on the Mississippi River Mainline Levee enlargement projects. He stated that the Board requests a Corps of Engineers Hired Labor Crew be sent in to properly repair the 22 levee slides in the Mississippi Levee District. Next, he voiced the board's support for the Big Sunflower River Sedimentation Reduction Project, which will reduce flooding and sedimentation and improve water quality. He also discussed the impacts of the 2020 Flood and the impacts of flooding over the last five years, which include sand boils and water standing on top of the Ben Lomond Relief Wells. The board requested that Vicksburg District install more relief wells and dig a ditch to remove water from the existing relief wells. Next, he discussed the 2020 Flood's impacts on the Yazoo Backwater Area and voiced the board's support for the Yazoo Pump Project. Finally, he expressed the board's concerns with the Levee Safety Engineering Circular 1165-2-218, which they believe will force levee boards to take on a flood risk management mission, greatly increasing the liability of the boards.

[Formal Written Testimony
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11:31 Angeline Rodgers (Fish and Wildlife Conservation): Mrs. Rodgers discussed the Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee (LMRCC) and its partnership with the Corps of Engineers to complete 29 environmental improvement projects. Next, she discussed the Lower Mississippi River Resource Assessment (LMRRA) feasibility study on eight conservation reaches identified by the LMRRA. Lastly, she discussed the LMRCC's work with the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative to develop and updated economic profile of the river.

[Formal Written Testimony
Presentation](#)

11:41 Jennifer Sheehan (Arkansas Game and Fish Commission): She discussed the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission's concerns with the Beryl Anthony Wildlife Management Area (or WMA) along the Ouachita River. Because of recent flooding, trees become waterlogged and are dying and falling down because they are waterlogged. She requested Corps of Engineers' assistance with the 7,000-acre forest. She said that they are currently working with the Vicksburg District on a watershed study to understand the changes in the Ouachita River Basin following the construction of locks and dams on the river.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

11:50 David Weeks (Ex. Dir., Ouachita River Valley Association): Mr. Weeks discussed the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project and requested \$10.7 million a year for O&M. He discussed operation of Felsenthal and Thatcher Locks and dams being reduced from 24/7 operations to 10 hours per day/5 days per week. He requested that the locks and dams be returned to full service. Next, he expressed the association's support for water supply projects to recover the Sparta and Alluvial aquifers and to support drinking water and agricultural irrigation. Lastly, he requested that the East Bank Ouachita River levee be added to the MR&T project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

11:59 MRC members closing comments

12:03 Meeting Adjourned

Filed for the Record

Reynold Minsky (President, Fifth Louisiana Levee Board): Mr. Minsky discussed the 20 projects underway in the Fifth Louisiana Levee District to repair levee slides that resulted from the recent high-water events. Next, he discussed maintenance issues in the Tensas Basin Levee District. His levee district attempted to do minor maintenance in 1995 but was forced to stop by the Vicksburg District and now the levee district believes this is a major maintenance issue that should fall under the Corps of Engineer's responsibility. Lastly, he discussed the levee district's concerns with the 408 process and their opposition to the Levee Safety Program's Draft Engineer Circular.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Milton Chambliss (Claiborne County Port Commission): Mr. Chambliss requested continued dredging funding for the port for FY21 and 22; and support for the port's Section 107 Feasibility Study request under the Continuing Authorities Program.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)



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T. Benton Smith (Felton and Smith Law Firm): Mr. Smith is an attorney representing Ashbrook Island Land Company in Washington County, Mississippi. He stated that the Corps of Engineers has identified the need to construct substantial repairs to dikes and revetment near Ashbrook Island. He requested the commission's support for completing these repairs this year because of the constant loss of land on the property. He said that his client has requested these repairs for several years now, but the location is not selected as a priority for funding.

[Formal Written Testimony Presentation](#)

Joe Spraggins (Mississippi Department of Marine Resources): BG(R) Spraggins discussed the impacts of Bonnet Carré operation on the Mississippi Sound and State of Mississippi and possible alternatives to the current operation of the spillway. He also requested an EIS each time the Bonnet Carré Spillway is opened and an extension of the boundaries of the study to include all Mississippi jurisdictional waters.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Sherrell Johnson (Union County Water Conservation Board): Mrs. Johnson discussed rising groundwater levels in the Sparta Aquifer as a result of their water supply project reducing withdrawals by providing an alternative source of water. She also discussed adding water supply as a project purpose to the Ouachita-Black Navigation Project in WRDA 2020.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Jesse Medlin (Desoto County Board of Supervisors): Mr. Medlin discussed the Memphis Metro Area flooding and bank erosion due to stormwater runoff. This has led to an increase in flood insurance and is impacting the local economy. A feasibility study is underway that focuses primarily on flood risks but the Board of Supervisors requested that additional analysis be included to address environmental concerns, bank stabilization and clearing of streams and creeks to improve the conveyance of water.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Morgan City, Louisiana, Public Hearing Scheduled for August 28 (Canceled due to Hurricane Laura)

The commission had scheduled a public hearing in Morgan City, Louisiana, on August 28, but the hearing was canceled due to Hurricane Laura, which made landfall in south Louisiana on August 26. In lieu of a public hearing, the commission accepted formal written testimony for the record from 12 partners. The commission reviewed each testimony and provided formal written responses. The testimony and responses are held on file at the Mississippi River Commission Headquarters in Vicksburg, Mississippi and are available upon request.

Doug Daigle (Lower Mississippi River Sub-Basin Committee): Mr. Daigle discussed issues related to Gulf hypoxia; legislative and restoration efforts promoting natural flood infrastructure; and congressional efforts to authorize a comprehensive study for the lower Mississippi system below Old River.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)



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Gordon Dove (Terrebonne Parish President): Mr. Dove discussed the importance of the Morganza to the Gulf Hurricane Protection System and asked for the levees to be raised to their authorized height and for the two floodgates in the GIWW to be built. Next, he requested that the Corps of Engineer properly maintain Houma Navigation Channel (HNC) to its authorized depth and quickly move forward with the deepening of the HNC after Congress approves the Deepening Study. Lastly, he requested help completing the Bayou Chene project to protect against backwater flooding due to the MR&T.

[Formal Written Testimony Presentation](#)

Tim Matte (St. Mary Levee District): Mr. Matte discussed flood protection for the Atchafalaya Basin, including backwater flooding due to the inadequacy of the Avoca Island Levee. Congress authorized an extension of the Avoca Island Levee as part of the MR&T but it was withdrawn from the MR&T. The St. Mary Levee District believes that a permanent Bayou Chene Closure System will address the issue and that it should be part of the MR&T. Next, he discussed deficiencies in the MR&T levees in St. Mary Parish based on the project flood flow line. He then discussed seepage under the Tiger Island Flood Wall in Morgan City. He also requested that New Orleans District include agricultural operations benefits in its South Central Louisiana Study on levees in the area. Lastly, he discussed sedimentation in the Atchafalaya navigation channel below the Port of Morgan City, which negatively impacts navigation and worsens flooding.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Mac Wade (Port of Morgan City): Mr. Wade discussed the importance of the Port of Morgan City and the Atchafalaya River to the region. He then discussed the retrofitted offshore supply vessel that has been turned into the dredge *Arulaq* and is being operated to dredge the Bar Channel. Next, he discussed the need to consistently dredge the authorized 20x400 foot channel for the Atchafalaya. Sedimentation has become a major issue and is increasing the risk of backwater flooding. Sediment is also blocking the harbor and negatively impacting navigation. Berwick Bay Harbor sedimentation due to recent floods has obstructed access to docks and dredging is badly needed. He expressed concern about changing the operation of the Morganza Floodway and Old River Control to put more water down and sediment down the Atchafalaya. Next, he discussed the damages from recent floods and Hurricane Laura. Lastly, he requested additional funding for dredging through a supplemental or FY21 Work Plan.

[Formal Written Testimony Presentation](#)

Dean Wilson and Monica Fisher (Atchafalaya Basinkeeper): Mr. Wilson discussed the negative impacts of “water quality projects” (diversions) on fishermen and on flood storage capacity in the basin. He said that the diversions cause the basin to fill up with sediment, reducing its flood storage capacity and destroying wetlands. He was also critical of the Bayou Bridge Pipeline permitting process, which he said disregarded permit conditions and the environment. Lastly, he discussed permits for the basin in general and the need to abide by laws when enforcing permit conditions.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)



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Karen Gautreaux (The Nature Conservancy Louisiana): Mrs. Gautreaux discussed the environmental restoration of the Atchafalaya Basin, including the 5400-acre preserve near Bayou Sorrell which converted the area to wetlands.

Formal Written Testimony

King Milling (Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration): Mr. Milling discussed the Louisiana Coastal Area and Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority partnership with the Corps of Engineers and Mississippi River Commission. He also discussed the management of the Atchafalaya Basin for flood control, with a focus on the deteriorating condition of levees in the basin and the accumulation of sediment in the lower reaches of the basin. He requests additional dredging to remove the natural levees that have been built by accumulated sediment as well as additional dredging in the two outlets to more efficiently transport water and sediment to the Gulf.

Formal Written Testimony

William Ostheimer (Houma, LA): Mr. Ostheimer lives along the east bank of the GIWW and says that waterways users are damaging property belonging to private landowners by operating the GIWW in excess of its design standards. He requests regulatory authority be used to limit the operation of the GIWW to remain within its design standards. Next he requested that all diversions from the Atchafalaya into Terrebonne Parish via the GIWW be stopped until the Bayou Chene floodgate, Bayou Black Pump, and other features inside the Morganza to the Gulf levees are completed. Lastly, he requested that the Corps of Engineers release a status report on plans to divert Mississippi water into the Atchafalaya Basin.

Formal Written Testimony

Brian Moore, Natalie Snider, David Muth, Kim Reyher and John Lopez (Restore the Mississippi River Delta): They discussed the performance of the MR&T system during recent floods and the need to reevaluate the system in light of the increasing frequency and intensity of floods. They recommend a more holistic approach to flood control that restores the natural floodplain, utilizes outlets for ecosystem restoration, and improved mitigation, specifically the prioritization of the Maurepas Swamp Project to mitigate the impacts of the West Shore Lake Pontchartrain Levee.

Formal Written Testimony

Craig Romero (Port of Iberia, LA): Mr. Romero discussed the development of the Port of Iberia and its benefits for the regional economy. He also discussed the authorized AGMAC and associated plans for deepening the AGMAC channel. The Port of Iberia requested that the Corps of Engineers include the completion of Segment 3, the Freshwater Bayou portion of the AGMAC Project, in its planning.

Formal Written Testimony

Windell Curole (South Lafourche Levee District): Mr. Curole submitted a statement from a former Corps of Engineers employee who is now in the private sector. The former employee criticized the current standards for hurricane protection levee construction, which he says are too costly and are designed to protect against river flooding, not hurricanes. Mr. Curole also discussed pre-Katrina versus Post-Katrina policies and stated that Post-Katrina policies have not always been beneficiary.

Formal Written Testimony

