



Mississippi River Commission

Executive Summary of Statements Received
Postponed Session Scheduled for March 29 - April 3, 2020



Mississippi River Commission

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The Mississippi River Commission scheduled its 403rd Session for March 29-April 3, 2020, with public meetings scheduled in New Madrid, Mo.; Memphis, Tenn.; Greenville, Miss.; and New Orleans, La. The commission canceled the session due to the Center for Disease Control's restrictions on public gatherings in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. To keep the lines of communication open, the commission invited partners to submit written testimonies, which are held on file at the Mississippi River Commission Headquarters in Vicksburg, Miss. The following proceedings are a summary of the written testimony submitted for the record. The commission provided formal written responses to all testimony. These responses are also held at the Mississippi River Commission Headquarters.

The Mississippi River Commission holds inspection trips in accordance with Section 8 of the 1928 Flood Control Act:

“Sec.8....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 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. Forty-three partners provided formal written testimony to the commission.

Although the commission canceled the High-Water Inspection Trip, commissioners remained engaged virtually. Flooding on the lower Mississippi throughout March raised the possibility that Maj. Gen. Mark Toy would have to approve the operation of Bonnet Carré Spillway. Mississippi River Commission/Mississippi Valley Division staff provided the commissioners with updates on the status of flood conditions throughout the valley and on April 1 held a conference call with commissioners to inform them of the intention to operate the Bonnet Carré Spillway on Friday April 3, which would have been the same day as the New Orleans public meeting had it not been canceled.

Charles A. Camillo
Executive Director
Mississippi River Commission



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Mississippi River Commission Members as of March 29, 2020



Maj. Gen. Mark Toy
President
Appointed July 23, 2019



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



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Top Regional Issues

Yazoo Backwater Flooding and Pump Project

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 on the date the commission had scheduled its public meeting in Vicksburg. Residents who had not yet recovered from last year's flood once again faced the prospect of economic devastation.

The people who live and work in the Yazoo Backwater Area overwhelmingly support the completion of the pump project. Of the 23 written testimonies the commission received, 18 were on flooding in the backwater area. 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.

Congress authorized the pump in 1941 as part of the compromise that eliminated the Eudora/Boeuf Floodway, which would have lowered flood stages by diverting Mississippi River floodwaters through southeast Ark. and northeast La. Channel improvements and the cut-off program carried out in the 1930s and early 1940s lowered flood stages and eliminated the need for the floodway. However, the floodwaters that would have passed through the floodway remained in the Mississippi, raising stages at Vicksburg. Much of this additional water would back into the Yazoo Backwater Area. For this reason, the compromise that eliminated the floodway included protection for the Yazoo Backwater Area. But closing off the backwater area with levees and gated structures only solved half of the problem. A pump was also needed to remove the rainfall and drainage from the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta that accumulates at the lower end of the Delta, flooding hundreds of thousands of acres.

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 supported the asking of 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. A Notice of Intent was filed in the Federal Register on April 16, 2020, and the Corps of Engineers is working towards having a final document in early 2021.



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Top Regional Issues

Levee Slides and Repairs

The 12-month period from July 2018 through June 2019 was the wettest the Mississippi River valley had experienced since the U.S. began keeping records in 1895. The 2019 flood surpassed even the great flood of 2011 and stands as the flood of record in terms of total volume of water and duration. Because of the long duration of the 2019 flood, water was continuously on the levees for months at a time, leading to levee slides as the floodwaters receded. This problem was compounded by the fact that the floodwaters fell after the spring then promptly rose again nearly just as high a couple months later followed by high water and wet conditions in the fall. Because of the intense saturation on the levees, the slides grew worse and the Corps of Engineers was unable to carry out repairs during a shortened construction season. High water in the spring of 2020 has once again placed water on the levees, preventing the Corps of Engineers from repairing the levee slides, leading to further deterioration of the levees.

Given the frequency and duration of flooding the last few years, our partners request that these repairs be included in the budget and swiftly completed before another high-water event pushes repairs back even further. The longer the repairs are put off, the more the condition of the levees will deteriorate. This increases the risk to the MR&T system and to our partners who live and work under the protection of MR&T levees. Just as the repair and recapitalization following the 2011 flood allowed the MR&T system to safely pass the 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2020 floods, so too must the Corps of Engineers repair the system now to pass future floods. **Our partners request that the commission support the prompt completion of repairs to levees.**

Interior Drainage and Ditch Cleanout

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 floodplain, which includes some 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 Mississippi River mainline levee system, the backbone of the MR&T Project, protects these interior lands from floods originating from the Mississippi. However, without proper interior drainage, the same lands protected by Mississippi River levees and tributary levees are flooded because the runoff cannot make it into the drainage ditches or because the ditches themselves are blocked and overflow their banks, flooding the very same farmlands the ditches were designed to protect.



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Top Regional Issues

The proper maintenance of drainage ditches is a perennial challenge for our partners. Without proper maintenance, most ditch blockages flood farmlands, homes and businesses. Maintenance of many of these drainage ditches are a Federal responsibility and yet the backlog of maintenance items continues to grow. Our partners largely maintain the ditches that are a non-Federal responsibility, but this matters little if the ditches that are a Federal responsibility are blocked, leading to flooding of surrounding lands.

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.

Reevaluation of Water Management and Operation of the MR&T System

The last decade has been amongst the wettest on record in the lower Mississippi River valley. In five of the last ten years, the lower Mississippi has been above flood stage. Between the fall of 2018 and summer of 2019, the Mississippi River watershed experienced its wettest period in 124 years, which is as far back as our records go. The 2011 flood set records for stages and peak discharges, while the 2019 flood set records in terms of duration and total volume of water. Since 2011, the Bonnet Carré Spillway has been operated six times, whereas it had been operated just twice over the previous two decades.

In response to the increased frequency of high-water events over the last decade, some of our partners have requested a reevaluation of the operation and management of the MR&T system. The Mississippi River Commission oversaw the last comprehensive review of the MR&T Project, which was published as House Document No. 308 in 1964. Congress authorized the recommendations of the six-volume study in the 1965 Flood Control Act and the study has served as the master plan for the MR&T Project ever since. The study included a new Project Design Flood and flowline which served as the basis for design and operation of the MR&T. In 1973, the commission oversaw a revised flowline study that accounted for changes in the river since the original flowline was completed in 1955. The 1973 flowline serves as the current basis for the design of the MR&T.

The Mississippi Valley Division is currently conducting the Old, Mississippi, Atchafalaya and Red River (OMAR) assessment under the authority of the MR&T Program. The OMAR assessment will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Old River Control Structure and its interactions with the Mississippi and Atchafalaya Rivers.



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Looking beyond the OMAR technical assessment, Congress is considering authorization of a more comprehensive study of the management and operations of the Lower Mississippi River that would address not only flood risk management and navigation challenges, but also ecosystem restoration, water supply, hydropower, etc. Several of our partners have requested that Congress include authorization and funding for a comprehensive study in the upcoming WRDA bill.

12-foot Channel for Red River

Our partners from the Red River valley request authorization of a 12-foot channel for the J. Bennett Johnston Waterway. Currently the waterway is authorized and maintained for a 9-foot channel. The Red River Valley Association Navigation Committee and the project's local sponsor, the Red River Waterway Commission, fully support this initiative. Both organizations have submitted a request and justification to the Corps of Engineers for a project modification for consideration of a 12-foot channel. The request also includes letters of support from stakeholders throughout the Red River valley.

Congress included the authorization for a feasibility study in the America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018. However, the study has still not been funded. In 2010, the RRWC funded their own analysis that shows a 4.6:1 benefit-cost-ratio.

Our partners from the Red River valley point out that all of the major waterways south of Cairo, Ill., are currently authorized for a 12-foot channel. **The Red River remains the ONLY waterway below Cairo not authorized to a 12-foot channel.** Barges destined for the waterway must be specially loaded to nine feet, creating a great inefficiency for industry and shippers. Increasing the channel to 12 feet would greatly increase the efficiency of the waterway. The increased competition would also reduce waterborne transportation rates as well as rail rates. Our partners in the Red River valley state that over 90% of the 210-mile waterway already exceeds 12 feet and the five locks on the waterway are capable of passing a 12-foot draft.

Our partners in the Red River valley are certain that the benefits of maintaining the waterway to 12 feet easily outweigh the costs. They believe that minimum maintenance dredging and navigation structures would be enough to maintain a 12-foot channel. They also believe that a 12-foot channel will make the waterway more competitive, which will attract industries and capital investment, and ultimately lead to economic growth and job creation for the region. For these reasons, **our partners from the Red River valley ask the Mississippi River Commission to support the authorization of a 12-foot channel for the Red River.**



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Summary of Formal Written Testimony for the Record

Memphis District

Rep. Jason Smith (MO-8): Rep. Smith's testimony discussed several issues relevant to southeast Mo., including: adequate funding for and completion of the MR&T Project; 2020 flood; the replacement of aging pump stations; Birds Point-New Madrid Floodway activation and prompt reconstruction following activation; ongoing construction projects at the Caruthersville Floodwall and the restoration of St. Johns Basin Farrenburg Levee; drainage ditch cleanout and scour repairs in the upper St. Francis Basin; blockages in the Belle Fountain ditch system; and WRDA 2020.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Dustin Boatwright (Little River Drainage District, Chief Engineer and Ex. Vice Pres.): Mr. Boatwright identified several maintenance issues in LRDD which are being worked on by the Memphis District. These issues include scouring, erosion and slides along several sections of levee; cleanout of drainage ditches; relief well remediation along the Headwater Diversion Channel Levee; and alterations to the Big Lake Gate Structures Operating Instructions. Mr. Boatwright also requested that operation of Lake Wappapello be transferred from St. Louis District to Memphis District since the lake's operation is intended to protect the St. Francis Basin downstream of Wappapello, which falls within Memphis District's boundaries.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Charles Earnest (President, Elk Chute Drainage District): Mr. Earnest discussed ongoing construction of the South Levee Renovation. He also requested cleanout of the Belle Fontaine Ditch to remove a sandbar and installation of a gate. A slide at the West Levee due to the 2019 flood requires repair and a contractor is scheduled to begin work as soon as weather permits. During a previous cleanout of the Elk Chute ditch, spoil was left on the bank next to the Elk Chute levee, constricting flows during high water and potentially causing the levee to overtop. The drainage district's proposal is to move the spoil to the land side of the North Levee.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Tim Hunter (Ex. Dir. New Madrid Port Authority): Mr. Hunter discussed the four-year process required for the New Madrid County Port Authority to receive a 404 permit from Memphis District for a port about one mile below New Madrid, Mo. There were several issues with mitigation for the port which delayed the process, especially the 401 permit process which was necessary before a 404 permit could be awarded. On March 26, 2020, Memphis District awarded the permit.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Michael Bernard (Drainage District No. 3, Pemiscot County and St. Francis Levee District, Mo.): Mr. Bernard discussed the need for drainage ditch cleanout and repair for Belle Fountain Ditch and several ditches near Caruthersville, Mo. Blockages in these ditches are causing flooding to local farmlands, businesses and homes.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)



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Summary of Formal Written Testimony for the Record

Jimmy Moody (Dyer County Levee and Drainage District No. 1): Mr. Moody discussed rock work on Island No. 18 and construction on the Miston berm on the mainline MRL. He also discussed drainage issues in Running Reelfoot Bayou, which carries discharge from Reelfoot Lake. The bayou's capacity is not sufficient to carry the outflow from Reelfoot Lake, which is causing flooding in Obion and Dyer counties, in Tenn. and Ky., where Reelfoot Lake is located, is also impacted because they cannot pass enough discharge from Reelfoot Lake. Mr. Moody requested a federal project to improve Reelfoot Bayou and increase its carrying capacity.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

David Blackwood (Ex. Dir. West Tennessee River Basin Authority): Running Reelfoot Bayou cannot pass the outflow from the Reelfoot Lake Spillway following the 2018 redesign of the spillway. This has led to flooding along the bayou and around the lake. The West Tennessee River Basin Authority (WTRBA) requested funding for a project to clean out the bayou and increase its carrying capacity. Mr. Blackwood also discussed the Piney Creek Study for Hatchie River and drainage issues in the creek due to sedimentation. The WTRBA also requested that the Corps of Engineers delegate more responsibility for tributaries projects within the MR&T Project; that the definition of a "new start" be revised to exclude improvements on previous Corps of Engineers projects such as Running Reelfoot Bayou; and that the partnership matching costs requirement be changed to reward proactive partners who invest in projects before the Corps of Engineers gets authorization for them.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Jim Carroll (Piney Ditch Drainage Board): Mr. Carroll discussed drainage issues in Big and Little Piney ditches that have caused flooding in the area. He requests the continued support of this critical channel maintenance project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Greg Curlin (Ex. Dir. of the Hickman-Fulton County Riverport Authority): Mr. Curlin thanks Memphis District for including dredging of Elvis Stahr Harbor in its budget. He also discussed the need to remove a point at the mouth of Elvis Stahr Harbor that keeps growing larger and obstructing navigation. Lastly, he discussed the Delta Regional Authority and asks the commission to continue supporting the DRA and its programs.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Shannon Davis (Chairman, Cache River Drainage District, Ark.): She discussed drainage issues in her district and requested assistance from the commission and the Corps of Engineers to develop and fund a sufficient outlet for floodwaters south of Grubbs, Ark., and a maintenance plan for the Cache River system.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Reynold Minsky (Fifth Louisiana Levee District and Mississippi Valley Flood Control Association): Mr. Minsky provided a letter from the MVFCA asking the commission to support an annual appropriation of \$500 million for the MR&T Project. The letter also discussed the benefits of the MR&T and the necessity of completing the project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)



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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](#)

Rob Rash (St. Francis Levee of Arkansas): Mr. Rash 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 FEMA's mandatory flood insurance required under Sec. 107 authority because it mandates flood insurance for lands protected by MR&T levees. Mr. Rash was also critical of the WOTUS rule and Federal Flood Risk Management Standards, which broadly expand the definition of floodplain and "make it virtually impossible to inhabit areas protected by levees. Lastly, he asks for Congress to support funding for small ports and harbors, as well as the Upper Mississippi River Comprehensive Plan.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

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 the meetings they discussed the development of a more holistic water and habitat management plan for the floodway that would allow for more consistent ecosystem management St. Francis basin floodway and ecosystem management plan.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Jody Simmons (Chairman, St. Francis Drainage District of Clay and Greene Counties, Ark.): Mr. Simmons discussed blockages in several drainage ditches and progress on their cleanout. He requests consistent maintenance funding for repairs to these ditches. He also discussed bank erosion in the Big Slough and Mayo ditches that causes blockages in the channel. Next he discussed progress on a seepage berm project along the St. Francis River mainline levee and anticipates contracts for this project to be awarded in the summer of 2020. Lastly, he is critical of the levee certification process and requests more consistent communication and evaluation of levee certification standards.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Edward Swaim (Bayou Meto Water Management District): Mr. Swaim discussed the Bayou Meto water supply project. Turning on the pumps is now the main focus of the project. The Corps of Engineers is seeking a \$71 million cost share for Phase 1 and the State of Arkansas is going to lend the money to cover the non-federal portion of the cost share. The water management district is currently conducting an assessment that will allow it to borrow the funds necessary to match the Federal funds and complete phase 1 of the project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)



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Vicksburg District

Clay Adcock (Farmer in Holly Bluff, Miss.): Mr. Adcock is a landowner in Holly Bluff, a town in Yazoo County. He discussed the impacts of backwater flooding in Holly Bluff and supports the completion of the Yazoo Backwater Pump Project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Rich Brontoli (Red River Valley Association): Mr. Brontoli requested funding for J. Bennett Johnston Waterway (JBJWW) for dredging and channel maintenance. He also requested that Congress authorize and fund a 12-foot channel for the JBJWW. Next he discussed dewatering and inspections at Lock & Dam No. 1 and at the Old River Lock and requested that this be done at both structures simultaneously to prevent extended closure of the JBJWW. Mitigation is required for the JBJWW project, but due to increased land costs, the amount needed to cover mitigation has increased by around \$6.5 million. The RRVA will request that WRDA 2020 include a provision for this increased funding limit. Due to the earmark ban, the RRVA does not believe that the Southwest Arkansas Navigation Feasibility Study will be funded to completion, so the State of Arkansas will conduct a Section 203 study. The RRVA is critical of current metrics used to measure the economic benefits of waterways and volunteers to help USACE in conducting a post project evaluation of the JBJWW to more accurately assess the economic benefits of the waterway. Lastly, the RRVA is critical of the earmarks ban as it makes it difficult to fund much-needed projects.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Colin Brown (Red River Waterways Commission): Following the 2018 and 2019 high-water events, USACE expended all of its dredging funds for the JBJWW and received no additional funds. In order to avoid a closure of navigation on the waterway, the RRWC hired a contractor to dredge the waterway. As of March 17, 2020, USACE still does not have a dredge contract in place. He requests adequate funding for dredging and channel maintenance on the JBJWW. He requests that dewatering at Lock & Dam No. 1 and Old River Lock be performed simultaneously to prevent an extended closure of navigation on the JBJWW. Land acquisition for mitigation for the JBJWW continues, but due to increased land costs, it is likely that the authorized amount for project mitigation will need to be increased through WRDA authorization. He also discussed the economic and recreational benefits of the JBJWW.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Cobie Collins (President, Yazoo County Board of Supervisors): Mr. Collins discussed the impacts of backwater flooding in Yazoo County and the Board of Supervisor's support for the Yazoo Pump Project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Kevin Corban (Rolling Fork, Miss.): Mr. Corban discussed the impacts of backwater flooding and affirmed his support for the Yazoo Backwater Pump Project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)



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Ann Dahl (Eagle Lake, Miss., Resident): Mrs. Dahl discussed the impacts of backwater flooding around Eagle Lake and her support for the Yazoo Backwater Pump Project. Road closures due to the flooding have forced residents of Eagle Lake to take an alternative route which is dangerous due to the bad conditions of the road.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

George Darden (Farmer from Onward, Miss.): Mr. Darden is a farmer from Onward, Miss., and his land has been in his family for three generations. He has farmed this land since 1969. He described the impacts of the backwater flooding and his support for the Yazoo Backwater Pump Project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Victoria Darden (Farmer from Onward, Miss.): Mrs. Darden is the daughter of Randy Darden and farms 1,100 acres in Onward, Miss. She described the impacts of flooding in the Yazoo backwater and her support for the pump project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Hunter Fordice (Fordice Construction Co): Mr. Fordice owns a 3,000-acre farm in Issaquena County, Miss., which was flooded in 2019 and 2020. He supports the completion of the Yazoo Pump Project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

W. Briggs Thompson (Mississippi State Senator): Mr. Thompson is a Mississippi State Senator for District 23, which is comprised of Warren and Issaquena counties. He discussed flooding in the Yazoo Backwater Area and his support for the pump project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Frank Howell (Ex. Vice President, Delta Council): Mr. Howell expressed the Delta Council's support for the completion of the Upper Yazoo and Delta Headwaters projects, all of which are part of the MR&T. He also discussed urban flood protection in Greenwood and Yazoo City, as well as the Yazoo River levee system, all of which are in poor condition. The Delta Council requested an evaluation of the conditions of these projects and a plan of improvement. Next he discussed the need to fund maintenance work on the Sunflower River, which has not had maintenance done in 30 years. He also discussed the impacts of Yazoo Backwater Area flooding and expressed the council's support for the pump project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Bryan Jones (Yazoo City, Miss.): Mr. Jones is a retired banker who lives in Yazoo City and supports the completion of the Yazoo Backwater Pump Project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Allen Latimer (Mayor of Horn Lake, Miss.): Mayor Latimer discussed a study that Memphis District agreed to do a year-and-a-half ago on flooding in DeSoto County, Miss. He requested that the commission support the completion of this study.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)



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Fred Miller (Mayor of Rolling Fork, Miss.): Mayor Miller discussed the impacts of flooding in the Yazoo Backwater Area in 2019. Surrounded farms were flooded and farmers were unable to plant a crop. He said that if the water had risen another foot, it would have flooded Rolling Fork. He supports the construction of the pump project as it is needed to protect one of the poorest regions in the entire country.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Reynold Minsky (President, Fifth Louisiana Levee Board): Mr. Minsky discussed progress on the construction of several projects along the Mississippi River Levees in the Fifth Louisiana Levee District, including construction of relief wells at Blackhawk. The levee board is working closely with Vicksburg District to provide the necessary rights-of-way for these levee projects. His levee district and the Tensas Basin Levee District continue to have issues with a levee along the Tensas. The issue dates back to 1995 when the two levee districts attempted minor maintenance and ended up having to stop due to a “cease and desist” order from USACE. The two levee districts believe that this is now a major maintenance issue and should fall under USACE’s responsibility. Next, he expressed the board’s disappointment with the 408 permit process and would like for USACE to expand the definition of “federal project” to go beyond right-of-way and include the 1,500-foot zone that directly impacts the integrity of the levee. The board is also strongly opposed to the new USACE Levee Safety Program.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Greg Moseley (President, Yazoo County School Board): Mr. Mosely discussed the impacts of the 2019 and 2020 floods in Yazoo County near Holly Bluff. He said that opposition to the pump project is led by environmentalists who live far away from the impacted area. His board supports the removal of the EPA’s veto of the pump project and asks the commission to advocate for it.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Peter Nimrod (Chief Engineer, Board of Mississippi Levee Commissioners): Mr. Nimrod discussed progress on Mississippi River levee enlargement projects as well as 20 levee slides in the Mississippi Levee District. The board requested that the hired labor crew be brought in to repair the slides. 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 5 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. There are several issues with levee slides and a deficient roadway at Item 465L along the Mississippi River Mainline Levee and HWY 465 because of flooding near Eagle Lake. The Board requested that the district send a contractor to repair the slides and replace the 1,500 feet of deficient limestone to create a safe roadway for use by Eagle Lake residents during flood events. Lastly, he discussed the recent flooding in the Yazoo Backwater Area and voices support for the pump project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Darris Pinkins (Chief of Rolling Fork Fire Department, Miss.): Mr. Pinkins discussed the impacts of the 2019 flood in Sharkey County and the town of Rolling Fork. He supports the Yazoo Backwater Pump Project and asks the commission to support the project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)



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Glenn Reams (Chief of Holly Farms Fire Department, Miss.): Mr. Reams discussed the impacts of the 2019 and 2020 floods in Yazoo County near Holly Bluff. He said opposition to the pump project is led by environmentalists who live far away from the impacted area. His board supports the removal of the EPA's veto of the pump project and asks the commission to advocate for it.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Randy Scott (Director of Public Works, Rolling Fork, Miss.): Mr. Scott discussed the impacts of the 2019 flood on the town of Rolling Fork, especially on the sewage system. If the elevation was just slightly higher, it would have overtopped the lagoon levees where untreated water is stored, which would have been an environmental disaster. He voiced his support for the Yazoo Backwater Area Pump Project and asked the commission to support the project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Billy Van Devender (Landowner from Miss.): Mr. Van Devender owns a farm and timberlands near Vicksburg as well as Anderson Tully sawmill in Vicksburg. He discussed the history of flooding in the Yazoo Backwater and the increased flooding of the Mississippi River over the last decade. He believes that this increased flooding is due to how Old River Control and Morganza are operated. He requested that Old River and Morganza be operated to release more water in the winter and fall because he believes this will lower stages below Natchez in the spring. He would like the Corps of Engineers to operate Old River Control and Morganza to reduce flooding below Natchez and also to limit the operation of the Bonnet Carré Spillway because of the impacts of operation on the Mississippi Sound. He also stated that \$200 million was appropriated for dredging in south La. but none for the “mudberg” below Old River. Lastly, he asked about the status of the EPA's veto of the Yazoo Backwater Pump Project and voiced support for the project.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Thomas Walker (Jones Walker, LLP, Attorney for Baleshed Plantation Farms, LLC): Mr. Walker is an attorney representing Baleshed Plantation Farms, a 4,000-acre farm along the east bank of the Mississippi in Issaquena County, Miss. During high-water conditions, vessels traveling upstream are navigating through an improper channel, which damages the riverbanks and the dikes. Because of high river stages over the last decade, vessels use the improper channel more frequently and this has led to substantial bank loss. The property owner contacted the Coast Guard, which issued a broadcast notice to vessels warning them not to use the improper channel, but vessels have ignored the notice. The property owner requested that the Corps of Engineers visit the site for an inspection to determine if anything can be done to strengthen the bank and repair the dikes. He believes that if nothing is done, the damage to dikes and the riverbank could negatively impact the authorized navigation mission. Mr. Walker included a 34-slide presentation with photos and maps of the property damaged.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)



Mississippi River Commission

Executive Summary of Statements Received
Postponed Session Scheduled for March 29 – April 3, 2020

Summary of Formal Written Testimony for the Record

David Weeks (Ex. Dir., Ouachita River Valley Association): Mr. Weeks said that annual funding for O&M of the Ouachita River navigation system is inadequate. Felsenthal and Thatcher Locks and Dams are currently operating at reduced hours because of the decline in tonnage. Mr. Weeks says that the declining tonnage on the river is due to decreased funding for dredging. ORVA requests that the locks be operated 24/7 because otherwise this will cause delays which will lead to further declines in tonnage. He also requested that the lower 14,000 feet of Little River that flows into the Black River be added to the Ouachita-Black Navigation Project so that the Corps of Engineers can dredge this stretch of Little River, which causes sedimentation issues for the Black. He next discussed water supply issues and water storage projects in eastern Ark. and requested that water supply language for the Ouachita be added to WRDA. He also requested more funding to support recreation at Corps of Engineers lakes in the Ouachita Valley, including construction of a Corps of Engineers Field Office and Interpretive Visitor Center at Lake DeGray. Lastly, he requested that bank stabilization be added as a feature of the Ouachita-Black Navigation Project and that the lower 63 miles of the Ouachita River east bank levee be added to the MR&T.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Jack Willingham (Director, Yazoo County Emergency Management): Mr. Willingham discussed the impacts of the 2019 and 2020 floods in Yazoo County near Holly Bluff. He said opposition to the pump project is led by environmentalists who live far away from the impacted area. His board supports the removal of the EPA's veto of the pump project and asks the commission to advocate for it.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

New Orleans District

Chip Kline (Chairman, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority): Mr. Kline discussed recent floods and the increased frequency of flooding. He supports a reassessment of how the lower Mississippi River is managed in light of the greater frequency of flooding. He discussed the operation of Bonnet Carré Spillway and its impacts and recommended the use of the Maurepas, Union and Ama river diversions, which are part of the Louisiana Coastal Master Plan, in tandem with Bonnet Carré to improve outcomes for the operation of the spillway. He asked that the Union and Ama diversions be included in the next WRDA. He requested full funding for O&M of the Davis Pond and Caernarvon diversions in the next WRDA as well as authorization of a study to evaluate increased operation of the diversions as part of the reassessment of the management of the lower Mississippi. CPRA also supports using the "Room for the River" concept to reconnect the river to the floodplain when possible. CPRA requests full funding in support of the MR&T Project so that levee repairs and navigation improvements can be completed. Lastly, Mr. Kline discussed dredging, including his support for the beneficial use of dredge material as well as Sec. 1111 of WRDA 2018, which authorized a pilot program to award multi-year dredging contracts. He asks the Mississippi Valley Division and the commission to continue to support this pilot program and to also use it to dredge other areas with an historic need for dredging.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)



Mississippi River Commission

Executive Summary of Statements Received
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Summary of Formal Written Testimony for the Record

Restore the Mississippi Delta: They discussed the 2019 flood and the impacts of the operation of the Bonnet Carré Spillway. They request that the MR&T Project and lower Mississippi River be managed more “holistically” by allowing room for the river and reconnecting the river to the floodplain. They also ask that the Corps of Engineers use its authority to prevent development in the floodplain by denying permits. Next they requested the use of diversion outlets to reduce flows through Bonne Carré and for environmental restoration. They oppose the proposed mitigation plan for the West Shore Lake Pontchartrain Levee, which used mitigation banks, and prefer the use of the CPRA’s River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp Project as mitigation.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)

Mac Wade (Port of Morgan City): Mr. Wade discussed recent floods and Tropical Storm Barry and how these events have caused significant shoaling in the Atchafalaya River. He said that a 20-by-400-foot channel is needed to maintain industry and 8.3M cubic yards of material (1M cubic yards in an average year) had to be removed to maintain these channel dimensions. Because of the 2020 high-water event, additional dredging is needed once again. He requested additional funding for dredging through a supplemental or in the FY2020 Work Plan. He wants to work with the Corps of Engineers on more efficient solutions to maintain the channel, including new methods of dredging, river training structures and revetment; 100% beneficial use of dredge material and the use of sediment for costal restoration; and contracting with a dredging company to do the Atchafalaya River, Chene, Black and Boeuf bayous, and the MR&T Project under one contract.

[Formal Written Testimony](#)