



Operation Watershed Responding to the Historic Mississippi River Flood of 2011



RECOVERY OPERATIONS Interagency Recovery Task Force Meeting Minutes, 23 August 2011

Purpose. This document provides a summary of the IRTF meeting held in Pearl, MS on 23 August 2011 to include a list of participants and state and federal agency perspectives.

Background. Interagency Recovery Task Force (IRTF) was launched to develop solutions to restore the Mississippi River Basin's flood risk management systems damaged by recent flood events. The collaborative task force, initiated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Mississippi Valley Division, aims to ensure effective communication and collaboration across the many federal and state agencies that will be engaged in the recovery effort. State partners include representatives from the states of Missouri, Illinois, Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana. In addition to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, federal agency task force representatives include EPA, FEMA, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Maritime Administration. The task force's first task is to prioritize short- and long-term goals to "Reset" and "Restore" the key functional elements of the Mississippi River & Tributaries system, including levees, navigation channel, and water control structures that protects lives and livelihoods for millions of Americans. The "Reset" effort will strive to provide the rapid development and installation of initial interim measures designed to provide a basic level of protection and functionality before the next flood season, addressing floodways, dredging for navigation, and levee degradation. The "Restore" effort will strive to provide for the development and installation of permanent measures designed to return the structure to full-level protection and functionality.

Introduction and Overview. MG Michael Walsh and Ms. Karen Durham- Aguilera provided the participants with an overview of the MR&T system and the 2011 Flood. MG Walsh stated the Joint Chiefs listed the budget deficit as the biggest problem with the nation. The probability of a supplemental appropriation for this flood is very low. The short term goal is to reset the system before the next flood season. In the long term, the work must be prioritized throughout the division.

Prior to the 1927 flood, there were only levees to control the river. The MR&T was designed with floodways and backwater areas to make room for the river. Easements were obtained on the land affected with the operation of the floodways. There were no easements obtained in the backwater areas. The key issue with Birds Point/New Madrid floodway is that once it is operated, it cannot be shut down.

MR&T System. As a request from the last meeting for our members to better understand the Corps meaning of "system," Scott Whitney presented on the Mississippi River and Tributaries. First, a historical perspective was provided, and then a comparison from the 1927 flood to our current system revealed the damages prevented and lives and livelihoods saved. Together, the floodways, reservoirs, levees, and backwater areas, worked together to guide the swollen river to the gulf.

Damage Assessments and Correlating Districts. The Corps has been assessing the MR&T system since flood waters started to rise and continued monitoring and documenting flood damages. A list was developed early on that represented critical repairs necessary prior to the spring floods. This list was created using preliminary findings and prioritized based on risk and consequences to life and safety. A spreadsheet was shared with the team that showed the priority items by function: Mississippi River Levees, Channel Improvement, Dredging,



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and Structures. To date there are 93 areas of concern, totaling over \$800M in repair costs. Maps of the critical list items, by District, accompanied the spreadsheet.

System Performance Evaluation. Mr. David Busse, lead for the System Performance Evaluation Team, presented on the efforts of the team. Currently, the team is made up of 10 individual teams: Reservoirs, Levees/Floodwalls/Outlet Structures, Floodways, Channel Improvement, Communications/Collaboration, Environmental, Economics, Flow lines/Design Flood, Data Management, and Reports. This is a system wide effort and involves subject matter experts from all 6 districts in the division. Other federal and state agencies, as well as stakeholders and NGOs will partner with the team. The IRTF will be part of the review process. The Silver Jackets groups provide the functional and operational arm of the recovery effort. The USGS has an after action report and will share results with System Performance Evaluation Team.

Catastrophic Levee Breach Plan & CUSEC

Mr. Mike Womack, Director, MEMA, gave a presentation on the State's Catastrophic Levee Breach Plan and also briefed the team on the recent meeting he attended for Central United Earthquake Consortium. The IRTF team was given a better perspective on what is involved at the State level during a major event and the scenarios created in order to facilitate a possible evacuation. The question raised is "How do we best prepare the public without causing undo fear?"

Inundation Maps

- Inundation maps helped plan and prepare if response was needed. States voiced desire for consistent inundation maps from all the districts. Maps were used to communicate risk.
- National Weather service appreciated inundation maps and communication during the flood.

State Perspective

- Alexander County, IL was an unprotected area affected by floodway operation. The people of Alexander County feel they were unfairly burdened by the operation of the floodway.
- Missouri would like a voice in the plan for recovery of the BPNM floodway.
- Efforts need to prioritize the creation of inundation models.
- Tools are needed to show the comparison of other floods, based on models and historical floods.
- There is a plan in place for operating the floodway but no plan for after it's been activated. After operation, what happens?
- There are key decision points, triggers, for operating the floodway. What is the process for changing those points? They don't appear to be static. What determines the triggers?
- We need a better model of what the confluence looks like for that flood profile. Substantially damaged – don't want to red flag.

Federal Perspective

- USFWS pleased with lines of communication. USFWS has strategic habitat plan and is concerned about reforestation between levees.
- USCG – Updated action plans with lessons learned
- MARAD – Navigation industry operated as safely as possible. USACE would let USCG know if tow boat wakes were damaging the levees.
- USDA-NRCS – will work with requests for damages in floodplain easements. What would work better in the future? Is it possible to flood land already in the wetland reserve program?
- River Industry Executive Task Force – Better SOP for towing industry about levees.



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Action Items.

- Non-structural process. Provide any recently identified methods that could help expedite buyouts. Proponent - FEMA HQ.
- HQUSACE National Perspective on System Performance. Proponent - Office of Homeland Security, HQUSACE
- Inundation model need to be shared. Web links to be provided.
- Phase II prioritization list is being created. IRTF will have a chance to weigh in on it.
- Shared access – the Mississippi Valley Division is in the process of updating webpages and will include a new page for Operation Watershed that will include updates to the IRTF, damage assessments, and the system performance evaluation. Documents shared with the team will also be on the webpage.

Next Steps:

- Meeting is scheduled for 20 October 2011, hosted by the State of Louisiana. Make reservation at the Hilton New Orleans Airport by 5 Oct, as rooms are blocked under CPA: Hilton New Orleans Airport, 901 Airline Drive, Kenner, Louisiana 70062 (1-504-469-5000)
- Encourage participation from all IRTF states and key federal agencies that were not in attendance.
- Disseminate draft PMP and charter to the IRTF again for signature at the next meeting.