

# Public Meeting In Re: Yazoo Backwater Meeting

Army Corps Meeting - (2 PM)

May 4, 2023

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US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

VICKSBURG DISTRICT

PUBLIC MEETING ON YAZOO BACKWATER

WATER MANAGEMENT

Public meeting held at the USACE office,  
4155 Clay Street, Vicksburg, Mississippi,  
on Thursday, May 4th, 2023,  
beginning at 2:00 p.m.

APPEARANCES NOTED HEREIN

REPORTED BY:

ELLA J. HARDWICK, CVR-M, CCR #1749

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APPEARANCES

Colonel Christopher Klein, Commander, Vicksburg  
District Commander, US Army Corps of Engineers

Mike Connor, Assistant Secretary of the Army  
(Civil Works)

Jeaneanne Gettle, Deputy Regional Administrator,  
EPA Region 4

Matt Strickler, Deputy Assistant Secretary for  
Fish and Wildlife and Parks, US Department of  
the Interior

Stacey Jensen, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary,  
Office of Assistant Secretary of the Army

Jacob Brister, Programs and Project Management  
Division Deputy Chief, USACE Vicksburg District

Brian Frazer, Director, Office of Wetlands, Oceans  
and Watersheds

Clay Miller, US Environmental Protection Agency

James Austin, US Fish and Wildlife Service

Various Members of Governmental Agencies

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1 COLONEL KLEIN: Okay. Welcome,  
2 everybody. I hope getting through  
3 security and finding parking was okay.  
4 Welcome to the Vicksburg District, your  
5 servicing area district.

6 I'm the commander here. My  
7 responsibility today is twofold. One,  
8 welcome to the federal team, federal  
9 family for coming back again to the  
10 District. It's an honor and my privilege  
11 to host you all here again. We're getting  
12 pretty decent at some things. So thanks  
13 again for coming.

14 For everybody else, I'm going to do  
15 quick, quick safety and a quick thing on  
16 where all the bathrooms and stuff are.  
17 So, first, if there is a fire drill -- we  
18 do not have any scheduled fire drills  
19 today. So the fire alarms go off, it's an  
20 actual fire, and we have to depart the  
21 building. And we're all going to go out  
22 from whence we came, very easy exits and  
23 egress out from there, and rally up, and  
24 we'll take accountability, make sure that  
25 we got everybody that made it in here.

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1           Two, the most important and the most  
2           likely is somebody's going to have to use  
3           the bathroom or want to drink a water. So  
4           there's two bathrooms. If you're on this  
5           side, it's probably easiest to get to the  
6           bathroom. It's located just diagonally in  
7           the front, left corner on the other side  
8           of the wall, not in the room, out the door  
9           to the front left.

10           For everybody else on this side, it's  
11           probably easier to go out that back door,  
12           hang a right and go out towards that back  
13           corner on the right-hand side as you go  
14           down that hallway. There are more  
15           facilities down there.

16           Most importantly -- that's a lot to  
17           take in -- me and my staff will be out in  
18           the back. So if you need anything or feel  
19           like you're getting lost in the building,  
20           find one of us, and we'll get you back to  
21           where you need to be. Without further  
22           ado, team, I turn it over to you.

23           MR. CONNOR: Colonel Klein, thank you  
24           very much again for being a gracious host.  
25           And I know we're putting you through your

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1 paces as far as big events, et cetera, so  
2 we'll add that to your resumé of many  
3 capabilities there.

4 Hello, everybody. Thank you for being  
5 here. My name is Mike Connor. I'm the  
6 Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil  
7 Works overseeing the Army Corps of  
8 Engineers, and we'll get into  
9 introductions here on a more general  
10 level.

11 But just to set the context, all of  
12 you I hope are in the right place if  
13 you're joining us to discuss our  
14 preliminary findings and joint preferred  
15 approach for a flood risk reduction water  
16 management plan in the Yazoo backwater  
17 area.

18 This is a return engagement for myself  
19 and for many of us up here who were down  
20 here a couple of months ago -- I guess,  
21 back in February, so several months ago --  
22 to have a number of public engagements on  
23 the approach that we were trying to  
24 develop collaboratively.

25 And just to reiterate, I discussed

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1           this at the time, that we had a memorandum  
2           of understanding between the Army Civil  
3           Works Program, Corps of Engineers, and EPA  
4           that myself and my counterpart at EPA, the  
5           Assistant Administrator for Water, Radhika  
6           Fox, had signed in early January laying  
7           out a five-month process to work together.

8           And that was the difference that I  
9           mentioned at the time. We were not going  
10          to go back in the Army Corps and develop a  
11          project for flood control and throw it  
12          over the transom and simply wait for EPA  
13          to tell us whether it passed muster or  
14          not.

15          We were moving out together to work  
16          through a number of issues that had been  
17          complicating the process for a long time.  
18          And we laid out a schedule for doing that,  
19          and this is part and consistent with that  
20          schedule.

21          I would also note that recognizing  
22          it's not just the Army and the EPA, we  
23          also reached out to our friends at the  
24          Department of the Interior, who also have  
25          a role in looking at interest,

1 particularly under the Endangered Species  
2 Act, but other fish and wildlife  
3 coordination activities, and ensured that  
4 the Department of the Interior was rolled  
5 into this process overall.

6 And from that standpoint, I would just  
7 say, as a process, when we signed that  
8 MOU, quite frankly, I wasn't quite sure  
9 given all the iterations of a project and  
10 all the issues that had developed over  
11 time how well it would be received by all  
12 of you in the community and the affected  
13 areas and the areas at risk about us  
14 undergoing another federal process.

15 And I was quite happy with the  
16 feedback we got back in February about how  
17 I think consistently from a number of  
18 different folks realized the value that a  
19 collaborative process among federal  
20 agencies who hadn't been on the same page  
21 would be. So that was very helpful. I  
22 would say the meetings that we had earlier  
23 this year were not just informative, they  
24 were very impactful to all of us.

25 We heard from all of you about the



1           urgent need for flood control based on the  
2           experiences that you have had but also  
3           input on what form that flood control  
4           should take, and that was valuable on  
5           multiple levels.

6           And with that, I would just like to  
7           acknowledge, as if the devastation from  
8           flooding wasn't enough, obviously there  
9           has been much more devastation from other  
10          factors recently through Mississippi,  
11          Alabama, but particularly Sharkey County  
12          and the tornadoes that happened earlier  
13          this year.

14          So I just want to express my  
15          condolences, and I know we all share  
16          condolences for the devastation and  
17          obviously the loss of life in and of  
18          itself.

19          But managing flood risk is something  
20          that we are charged with, and particularly  
21          at the Army Corps of Engineers, and that  
22          we can address. And so, from that  
23          standpoint, we took your input, and this  
24          collective federal team that you will hear  
25          from here in just a little bit integrated

1           that into our ongoing effort to develop a  
2           preferred approach that is set forth in  
3           the MOU.

4           So, as I mentioned, the process had  
5           already started as soon as we signed the  
6           MOU, but the input that you provided was  
7           incredibly important. So what we're going  
8           to roll out today is a preliminary  
9           proposed approach for a comprehensive  
10          water management solution, which has got a  
11          number of different features and  
12          approaches, which will be described later.

13          Our goal is to provide a flood risk  
14          reduction plan that protects people, that  
15          protects the local economy, and that  
16          minimizes the impacts to fish, wildlife,  
17          and wetlands. And that's not only our  
18          legal charge, that is what we heard from  
19          all of you.

20          It wasn't just about flood risk  
21          reduction. You all experienced  
22          devastation. The environment  
23          discovered -- had devastating impacts  
24          during these prolonged flooding events,  
25          and you all made clear your hopes and

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1 desires that that would be addressed,  
2 also. So we appreciated that.

3 I'm not going to get in -- I'm  
4 probably the person least qualified to get  
5 into the technical aspects of the  
6 comprehensive water management plan. So I  
7 will let our talented technical team get  
8 into those details.

9 But, first, I just want to acknowledge  
10 everybody who you're going to hear from  
11 today and do introductions, if I could.  
12 Jeaneanne Gettle is the Deputy Regional  
13 Administrator for EPA Region 4. Matt  
14 Strickler is with the Department of  
15 Interior. He is the Deputy Assistant  
16 Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

17 On my team, Stacey Jensen is our  
18 Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary  
19 overseeing policy, and I think ten other  
20 hats that she wears on an ongoing basis.  
21 Jacob Brister is going to be doing  
22 technical presentations here from the  
23 Vicksburg Army Corps of Engineers  
24 District.

25 We've got Brian Frazer -- there you

1 go, Brian -- and Clay Miller from EPA, who  
2 are going to be part of the presentation  
3 team, and James Austin with the US Fish  
4 and Wildlife Service.

5 So this entire team -- and I should  
6 say over here, we have a whole range of  
7 federal partners who I believe  
8 participated in our workshop earlier  
9 today, which I greatly appreciate the  
10 diversity. I can't see all the placards.  
11 Forest Service, FEMA, I think  
12 Transportation, I think Department of  
13 Agriculture. Who am I -- did I get  
14 everybody?

15 The whole idea there is to followup on  
16 the commitment that has been made from the  
17 start of this process to bring a whole  
18 government approach, not just to look at  
19 flood control itself, but the other areas  
20 of risk that could be addressed through  
21 other federal programs that work part and  
22 parcel with the preferred approach that  
23 we're laying out.

24 And I understand in this morning's  
25 discussion, the added value of there was

1           also a lot of discussion about relief from  
2           the most recent disaster events in the  
3           area. So I think it was a valuable  
4           process.

5           I will just wrap up by saying that we  
6           are still strongly committed to finalizing  
7           an approach to comprehensively addressing  
8           flood risk reduction, and we are going to  
9           do that in a manner that's consistent with  
10          the Clean Water Act, with the Endangered  
11          Species Act, with all the other applicable  
12          laws and regulations.

13          And we have an idea of how we can do  
14          that. We need your ongoing input in that  
15          process. So thank you very much for your  
16          participation. And with that, I think  
17          we're going to go Jeaneanne next and then  
18          maybe Matt.

19          MS. GETTLE: Thank you, Mr. Connor.  
20          Well, good afternoon. As Mr. Connor said,  
21          I'm Jeaneanne Gettle, and I'm from the  
22          regional office for EPA, But I'm here also  
23          representing Assistant Administrator Fox  
24          out of the Office of Water. And we're  
25          really happy to be here. And I want to

1           acknowledge that flooding -- we continue  
2           to acknowledge that flooding is a huge  
3           concern in the Yazoo backwater area.

4                    But we also -- I want to, along with  
5           Mr. Connor, acknowledge the devastation of  
6           the recent tornadoes in this area and the  
7           loss of human life and the destruction  
8           that those tornadoes wrought on your  
9           communities and the many challenges that  
10          that presents to you.

11                   We are steadfast in finding a  
12          sustainable solution to reduce the impact  
13          of flooding in the Yazoo backwater area.  
14          Our shared goal with the Army and with our  
15          other federal partners is to develop a  
16          project that is consistent with the Clean  
17          Water Act and other applicable  
18          environmental laws and regulations.

19                   We've been working tirelessly on this,  
20          and there's a whole team in the back.  
21          Mr. Connor talked about the team here, but  
22          we've got a team in the back, and these  
23          are the people that sat in a room and  
24          worked on this project and brought their  
25          expertise -- along with the people here in

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1 the front row, brought their expertise to  
2 this to find a solution to change the way  
3 we were approaching it and really get to  
4 the heart of what we need to do here.

5 So I, personally, am very happy with  
6 the progress that we've made, and we're  
7 very happy to be here to get your  
8 feedback. We intend to consider that very  
9 carefully as we move forward.

10 And we are absolutely confident, from  
11 EPA's perspective, that if we continue  
12 with this engagement, we continue with  
13 this collaboration, this federal -- whole  
14 of federal approach that we can make an  
15 appropriate and sustainable solution for  
16 the communities and the economy and the  
17 environment in the Yazoo backwater areas.  
18 Thank you.

19 MR. STRICKLER: Good afternoon. My  
20 name is Matt Strickler, Deputy Assistant  
21 Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks  
22 at the Interior Department, and I'm told  
23 they put me in the middle here, because  
24 I'm the new guy. I hope y'all are not too  
25 hard on me today.

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1           My boss, Shannon Estenoz, I think was  
2           with you all last summer out here in  
3           Vicksburg and in the Yazoo Basin. And  
4           this is my first time to this area of the  
5           world.

6           I had an opportunity to go out with  
7           some of our National Wildlife Refuge  
8           System staff, Fish and Wildlife Service,  
9           this morning and see some of the land and  
10          some of the area, and it's clear that you  
11          all live in a very beautiful and special  
12          place, and I know that you all value that,  
13          and I know that you value your communities  
14          and your way of life and your economy.

15          And Fish and Wildlife Service  
16          considers itself a part of all of that,  
17          and a good neighbor. And so, I was very  
18          encouraged, I think, by the progress that  
19          we've seen between the EPA and the Army  
20          Corps wants to be supportive of that  
21          process moving forward.

22          We're really hopeful that we will be  
23          able to find a solution that can relieve  
24          some of the flooding impacts while  
25          simultaneously protecting the natural and



1 environmental resources that we know you  
2 all care so much about. So we look  
3 forward to listening and learning today.  
4 I'm certainly happy to answer any  
5 questions. Thank you.

6 MR. CONNOR: I think we're going to  
7 start the technical presentation of  
8 rolling out the proposed preferred  
9 approach water management plan. Jacob.

10 MR. BRISTER: Thank you so much,  
11 Mr. Connor.

12 Welcome to Vicksburg District. So,  
13 again, my name is Jacob Brister. I'm  
14 going to brief a few slides. I've got two  
15 of my friends here. We've got Clay Miller  
16 from EPA. He will follow me. And we've  
17 got James Austin from Fish and Wildlife,  
18 who will also brief us.

19 And we've got about 10 to 11 slides.  
20 We'll walk through this. We'll withhold  
21 questions until we get to the end, and  
22 then we'll open it up. So, next slide,  
23 please.

24 Okay. So for most in the room, 99.9  
25 percent of you, this slide will be a

1 little elementary. But just to make sure  
2 that we are all on the same page, I'm  
3 going to walk through the illustration  
4 over there on the left, just to kind of  
5 describe why we're here, what the  
6 backwater means, and how we're going to  
7 walk through this.

8 Over here on the left, so the bathtub  
9 area right here is what we're going to be  
10 briefing on today. So the way that this  
11 works, you got the Mississippi River on  
12 the far left, and this is the Yazoo River  
13 going up in this draining basin. So you  
14 got two sets of levees. You got the MRL  
15 levee, the mainland levee on the left, and  
16 this is the backwater levee on the right.

17 So what happens is right on the very  
18 bottom right here is the Steele Bayou  
19 structure. So when the Mississippi River  
20 starts to fill up, starts backing up the  
21 Yazoo River, right here, and that gate is  
22 open at Steele Bayou, the backwater goes  
23 through the -- through the gates and  
24 starts filling up the backwater area.  
25 Okay?

1                   So when the backwater area -- when the  
2                   Mississippi River is higher than the  
3                   backwater, we close the gates. Prevents  
4                   water from going in there. We're going to  
5                   open the gates when the backwater is  
6                   higher than the Mississippi River.

7                   So we've got these headwaters right  
8                   here coming down, two streams, Steele  
9                   Bayou and the Sunflower River. So before  
10                  I go any further, what we're presenting  
11                  today is the backwater, not the  
12                  headwaters. Okay? All right.

13                  Next slide, please.

14                  So the purpose. So I'm just going to  
15                  read this. "The recommended approach  
16                  provides flood risk reduction for  
17                  communities and the local economy. Flood  
18                  risk reduction will target primary  
19                  residences and the roads that isolate  
20                  them, the schools, infrastructure,  
21                  commercial properties, and prime farmland,  
22                  while minimizing the environmental  
23                  losses."

24                  Next slide.

25                  So what is our approach? So we're

1 going to walk through this. It's kind of  
2 like the three-legged stools. We've got  
3 structural, we've got non-structural, and  
4 then, we've got the agreements and the  
5 mitigation efforts at the bottom.

6 So what structure are we going to do?  
7 So we're going to go with a 25,000 CFS  
8 pump. It's going to be located right next  
9 to the structure. Then we're going to  
10 manage the backwater flooding seasonally.

11 So what does "seasonally" mean? So  
12 we're looking at two seasons, right? So  
13 we've got non-crop and crop. And the  
14 dates of these, they're not on the slide,  
15 but I'll brief you on them. So non-crop  
16 season is from November 1st to March 24th.  
17 Okay? Crop season, March 25th to  
18 October 31st.

19 So during the non-crop season, the  
20 second bullet there, the five-year  
21 floodplain, that's what we're going to  
22 manage the water to. So what is "manage  
23 the water to"? So in the non-crop season,  
24 we're going to allow the water to go up to  
25 the five-year floodplain, which is

1 approximately elevation 93.

2 During this presentation, you're going  
3 to hear the words "may," approximately."  
4 The reason that is, is we're kind of right  
5 in the middle of this process, right? So  
6 we're going to be refining these numbers  
7 to get final numbers.

8 So five-year floodplain is  
9 approximately 93 feet. So over here on  
10 the map, you can see different colors. So  
11 just to kind of describe what that is, the  
12 blue is the two-year floodplain. So  
13 that's the third bullet or the second  
14 bullet under the pump. Okay? Two-year  
15 floodplain is approximately 90 feet.

16 So everything in blue here would be  
17 inundated during crop season. Okay?  
18 Everything in pink, which everything in  
19 blue is also pink. Okay? The pink is  
20 just a little bit larger. That is the  
21 five-year floodplain, which is  
22 approximately 93.

23 So going on to the -- well, let me get  
24 a little bit of context here. So with the  
25 25,000 CFS pump, everybody kind of

1 remembers the flood of record, right?  
2 2019, 98.2. If this project would have  
3 been in place in 2019, the water would  
4 have peaked at 93.5. So just to give a  
5 little context of what we're planning  
6 here.

7 Okay. Moving down to the  
8 non-structural. So some things we're  
9 going to do non-structurally is the way  
10 that we currently operate the gate at the  
11 Steele Bayou structure. Like I said  
12 earlier, water comes up. It starts going  
13 through the structure. When the water  
14 gets approximately elevation 70, we close  
15 the gates to keep water to continue  
16 backing up.

17 So under this current plan, we're  
18 going to modify that and let more water  
19 in. Okay? So that number is another  
20 maybe somewhere between elevation 74 and  
21 78. So we're going to let an additional 4  
22 to 8 feet of water into the backwater  
23 area.

24 Now, when that backwater area gets  
25 higher than the Mississippi River, we're

1 going to open the gates and that water  
2 will go out. So that's the first  
3 non-structural.

4 The second non-structural, pretty  
5 self-explanatory. Buyouts, ring levees,  
6 home elevations, potentially even some  
7 road elevations. So those will be some  
8 options provided in the final.

9 And then, finally, the federal  
10 agreement. So you can see three things  
11 there. So what the federal agencies are  
12 going to do, all of us at the table, is  
13 we're going to sign agreements. Okay?  
14 That's basically going to assure that  
15 we're going to do those three things.

16 So the water control plan, everybody  
17 at this table is going to be on the  
18 signatory of that. We're all going to be  
19 in agreement. The same thing with all the  
20 follow-up monitoring that we're going to  
21 do, as well as the compensatory mitigation  
22 plan. Okay? All right.

23 Next, Mr. Clay Miller.

24 MR. MILLER: Good afternoon. I'm  
25 Clay Miller from the EPA, and if I could

1 have the next slide, please.

2 So you just heard Jacob talk about  
3 sort of the project purpose for this  
4 project or what we're considering right  
5 now for the water management solution, and  
6 one of those components has to deal with  
7 the primary residences.

8 And those are those -- the project  
9 purpose for that is actually to provide  
10 flood risk reduction for those primary  
11 residences. And as outlined by Jacob, the  
12 water management solution for those  
13 residences above the five-year a pump  
14 would be in place to keep the water down  
15 at that approximate 93, which is the  
16 five-year flood zone.

17 However, for the residences within the  
18 five-year flood, so any primary residence  
19 that's within that -- shown on this map in  
20 the pink, those areas would have to have a  
21 different solution to address any seasonal  
22 backwater flooding issues. So how did we  
23 go about doing that?

24 First, the Corps conducted a field  
25 survey to locate where those primary



1 residences were and, at the same time, to  
2 identify the elevations associated with  
3 those residences. And then finally, while  
4 they were doing that field survey over the  
5 last few months, they were also looking to  
6 see whether or not those structures, those  
7 primary residences, already had employed  
8 some form of flood proofing already taking  
9 place.

10 For example, are those homes within  
11 that five-year, have they already been  
12 elevated, or was there a ring levee in  
13 place? On this map, we are just depicting  
14 some of the preliminary field assessment  
15 for within the five years.

16 So you'll see a couple of stars.  
17 Those are where we believe that there are  
18 some of these primary residences that  
19 would potentially be impacted by the  
20 operation of the water management solution  
21 within the five-year floodplain.

22 For those properties that are going to  
23 be directly impacted by that seasonal  
24 backwater flooding -- so during that  
25 non-crop season, we're going to allow the

1 water to go up to the five-year floodplain  
2 whenever that backwater is available to do  
3 so. For those that are within that, as I  
4 said, the pump is not going to be  
5 addressing that.

6 So what we're going to be doing is  
7 looking, as Jacob had said, at some other  
8 considerations for addressing the flood  
9 risk reduction for those primary  
10 residences. So that would include  
11 potentially buyouts, elevating structures,  
12 or even the construction of ring levees.

13 We're also taking into account that  
14 what we don't want to see is any of these  
15 primary residents to be isolated. And  
16 what I mean by that is if a road that  
17 services provides that access to that  
18 primary residence, if that was below the  
19 93 during that time when the non-crop  
20 season, again, we're allowing the water to  
21 go up to approximately 93 on the five-year  
22 floodplain during that time, if that road  
23 was to be actually inundated, we're  
24 prohibited access, we're taking into  
25 consideration options to try to address

1           that, which could include the elevation of  
2           those roads.

3                     And then, finally, another  
4           consideration that we are taking into  
5           account or exploring options is for those  
6           primary residents within that five-year  
7           flood that obviously they may either be on  
8           a septic system or on a sanitary sewer  
9           system, we have to take into account how  
10          we're going to address that.

11                    So we're looking at options to try to  
12          deal with that and provide the protection  
13          to those septic fields, as well as if  
14          those residences are being on a sensory  
15          sewer system. So with respect to this  
16          issue on primary residence, we would  
17          welcome any feedback.

18                    And in the back of the room, there's a  
19          box, and you're welcome to provide any  
20          information. Again, what's shown on the  
21          map are sort of the preliminary ideas as  
22          to where some of these residents may be.

23                    Next slide, please.

24                    The other component or another  
25          component of the project purpose, which

1 Jacob had outlined, is dealing with  
2 agriculture. And what we're looking at  
3 there is to reduce flood risk to  
4 agriculture above the two-year floodplain.

5 So we recognize the importance of  
6 agriculture, not only to the economy, but  
7 to the communities within the Yazoo  
8 backwater area. We worked with NRCS and  
9 the Mississippi Department of Agriculture  
10 to better understand what the primary  
11 crops within the Yazoo backwater area are,  
12 what are the crop seasons for those  
13 primary crops, the days that it would take  
14 to reach maturity for those primary crops,  
15 and what some of the methods for field  
16 preparation were needed based on that.

17 Based on that, looking into that  
18 information and getting into sort of  
19 analyzing all that information, we were  
20 able to prioritize for protection the  
21 following primary crops within the Yazoo  
22 backwater area, that being soybeans, field  
23 corn, and cotton.

24 Now, balancing the crop season with  
25 fish and wildlife and wetland needs, we

1 estimate that -- as I think Jacob alluded  
2 to, we estimated that a pump on date of  
3 March the 25th would be employed to draw  
4 down the water. So water would start to  
5 come off the land, if it's up above the  
6 two-year flood, we would bring that all  
7 the way down to the two-year elevation and  
8 maintain it at that.

9 We would not allow water, or we would  
10 restrict water, from going above the  
11 two-year floodplain during the crop  
12 season, after which, going into the  
13 non-crop season, the floodwaters would be  
14 then managed to return or be allowed to  
15 return up to the extent of the five-year  
16 floodplain.

17 So crop season would be from  
18 March 25th all the way through to  
19 October 31st. Non-crop season,  
20 November 1st through March 24th. Again,  
21 like with the residents, what we would  
22 appreciate is any feedback on these crop  
23 season dates. I'll go to the next slide,  
24 and I'm going to turn it over to James  
25 Austin.

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1                   MR. AUSTIN: Good afternoon. I'm  
2                   James Austin, again with the U.S. Fish and  
3                   Wildlife Service, and I'm going to visit  
4                   with y'all for a few minutes this  
5                   afternoon about some of the fish,  
6                   wildlife, and wetland considerations that  
7                   went into this current proposed solution.

8                   First, I'm just going to give you a  
9                   little bit of background about some of the  
10                  resources within the Yazoo backwater area.  
11                  And I know, looking around the room, you  
12                  folks know a lot more about some of these  
13                  resources than I do. You live there, you  
14                  live amongst it, and you understand it.

15                  But just going to name a few things  
16                  that we feel are important about this area  
17                  from a natural resources standpoint. It  
18                  includes a very productive floodplain  
19                  fishery. It's one of only a few remaining  
20                  examples of the bottomland hardwood  
21                  ecosystem that once stretched across the  
22                  majority of the Delta in Mississippi and  
23                  in other states.

24                  It's also one of only four remaining  
25                  backwater ecosystems that continues to

1 maintain that important connection, that  
2 hydrological connection with the  
3 Mississippi River through that water that  
4 backs up into the Yazoo. And that's  
5 important, because it allows for nutrient  
6 and chemical exchange to occur. It allows  
7 for the ingress and egress of fish and  
8 other aquatic critters.

9 And so, this area is very rich in  
10 natural resources. It's a very diverse,  
11 unique area, and it's something that's  
12 important within our state.

13 So the area also supports, as you  
14 know, a wide variety of wildlife species  
15 that includes many, many species of  
16 resident and migratory land birds,  
17 shorebirds, wading birds, black bears  
18 occur within this area, a number of  
19 reptiles, amphibians. I could sit here  
20 and continue to list this off all  
21 afternoon.

22 But pretty much the point is, just  
23 about any taxonomic group of wildlife that  
24 we've got in Mississippi is just about  
25 represented within this area. In

1           addition, some of the species we don't  
2           always like to talk about. We do have  
3           some federally listed species within this  
4           area.

5           We've also got some species that have  
6           been proposed for listing within the area,  
7           and I'm going to list those off. Again,  
8           for those of you who are very familiar  
9           with this project, the first one you've  
10          heard many times. That's pondberry.  
11          That's an endangered plant that does occur  
12          within the backwater area. That's  
13          primarily within Delta National Forest is  
14          where we find that, and that species is  
15          endangered.

16          So another one that's a little bit  
17          newer to the scene since previous versions  
18          of this project is the northern long-eared  
19          bat. So that species was just recently  
20          uplisted from threatened to endangered,  
21          and it's thought to occur within the area.

22          We also have two species, the  
23          alligator snapping turtle and the  
24          tricolored bat, both of which have been  
25          proposed for listing under the Endangered



1 Species Act. And both of those are known  
2 to occur within the area.

3 So in addition to some of these more  
4 non-game, federally protected species that  
5 you may or may not be as familiar with, of  
6 course, of equal importance are the game  
7 species that occur within the area. Some  
8 of the more important ones, there, again,  
9 I'm preaching to the choir. Y'all know  
10 these species. Whitetail deer, waterfowl,  
11 eastern wild turkey, squirrel. I could  
12 keep going down this list, as well. A lot  
13 of wildlife species there that support  
14 hunting activities, more of a consumptive  
15 use.

16 And so, the three agencies, the Corps,  
17 the EPA, and the Fish and Wildlife  
18 Service -- from here on, I'm going to say  
19 the three agencies, because that's a  
20 mouthful to say the Corps, the EPA, and  
21 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

22 So the three agencies realize that  
23 these fish and wildlife resources support  
24 a number of recreational activities that  
25 are important to folks that live within

1           this area. They're important to local  
2           economies. They're important to tourism  
3           within this area.

4           We realize it's not just folks that  
5           live here that partake in these  
6           activities. Things such as hunting,  
7           fishing, boating, birding, hiking,  
8           camping, can continue to name those, as  
9           well. And we realize folks come from  
10          other parts of the state to partake in  
11          these activities, or from other states,  
12          even other countries, to experience this  
13          part of the world.

14          And so, again, we, all three agencies,  
15          recognize the importance of these  
16          activities and what they mean to this  
17          area, and it's a priority for us to ensure  
18          that these natural resources that support  
19          these activities continue to thrive so  
20          those things can continue to happen.

21          And so, to that end, the Fish and  
22          Wildlife Service has long maintained that  
23          any water management solution within the  
24          Yazoo backwater area should strive to  
25          balance the needs of fish and wildlife

1 resources alongside that important need to  
2 provide flood risk reduction for local  
3 communities and local economies.

4 And we believe that the proposed  
5 solution does just that through some of  
6 the measures that you heard mentioned  
7 earlier. The fact that we're going to now  
8 allow floodwaters to reach parts of that  
9 two-year and five-year floodplain, that  
10 helps to maintain habitats that fish and  
11 wildlife resources use, that helps to  
12 maintain wetland functions within that  
13 two-year and that five-year floodplain.

14 Another measure you heard mentioned  
15 was altering the way we operate the Steele  
16 Bayou structure. I mentioned earlier that  
17 that backwater coming in, that connection  
18 to the Mississippi River is important. It  
19 allows that chemical exchange to happen.  
20 It allows fish and other critters to come  
21 in and out.

22 And so, that's another example of  
23 balancing the needs, again, of the  
24 communities against the natural resources  
25 within the area. And so, all of these

1 measures have really been designed to help  
2 avoid, minimize, and reduce the adverse  
3 impacts that the project might have on  
4 fish, wildlife, and wetlands.

5 Of course, it's important to recognize  
6 that we can't always completely avoid  
7 adverse impacts, particularly when you're  
8 dealing with a project of the scope and  
9 complexity of this one, right? So there  
10 will be a need to provide appropriate  
11 compensatory mitigation to help offset  
12 some of these unavoidable adverse impacts.

13 And so, in working towards that  
14 mitigation, the three agencies, again,  
15 have been collaborating. All these folks  
16 you see sitting at the back table back  
17 here and more have been working together  
18 to evaluate or to come up with ways to  
19 evaluate impacts.

20 And one of the things we've done, and  
21 this is a working list, but we've got a  
22 list of species here that we're proposing  
23 to use to assess the impacts that the  
24 project will have on wildlife within the  
25 backwater area. This is an opportunity

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1 for you folks in the room to provide us  
2 with some feedback.

3 If you have feelings or thoughts about  
4 some of these species we've already  
5 included here, or if you've got ideas of  
6 other species that maybe we should look at  
7 to evaluate these impacts, we'd love to  
8 hear about that. There's comment cards in  
9 the back that you can fill out or that  
10 were in your chair, or you're welcome to  
11 tell us that here today. And so, an  
12 opportunity to provide some feedback  
13 there.

14 Hadn't mentioned fisheries a lot. The  
15 three agencies have also collaborated to  
16 look at some of the methods that we're  
17 using to assess impacts on fisheries  
18 resources, and we've made some refinements  
19 there, again, just to make sure that we're  
20 evaluating those impacts so they can be  
21 mitigated for on the back end of this  
22 thing.

23 So moving forward, the three agencies,  
24 this collaboration is going to continue.  
25 We're going to continue working together.

1 We're working on developing the right  
2 methods to assess impacts, and we're  
3 looking at developing ways to mitigate for  
4 those impacts.

5 And so, I'm going to stop right there,  
6 because those are topics that Clay is  
7 going to cover on the last couple of  
8 slides here. So, Clay, I'll turn it over  
9 to you.

10 MR. MILLER: That's tough to follow  
11 up on. Thank you very much, James.  
12 That's very well done.

13 So the next slide, please.

14 As James just highlighted, the fish  
15 and wildlife wetlands component of the  
16 multifaceted project purpose, because we  
17 know there's going to be impacts to these  
18 resources, they will need to be mitigated.  
19 But, first, we have to figure out and  
20 assess what those impacts to those  
21 resources will be.

22 Under the water management solution,  
23 backwater flooding will be seasonally  
24 managed, as I had said earlier, and I  
25 think Jacob had said, as well, in the

1 five-year and the two-year floodplains  
2 seasonally. There's a non-crop season,  
3 which will allow that water to go up to  
4 the -- to the extent of the five-year  
5 floodplain. And in the crop season, we'll  
6 manage it to the two-year elevation.

7 This solution manages in a manner that  
8 will result in a reduction of impacts, as  
9 James just articulated, to those wetlands  
10 to fish, wildlife, and other ecological  
11 resources, as well as, as we indicated  
12 before, using this water management  
13 solution, we'll be also looking to reduce  
14 flood risk to primary residents and  
15 agriculture.

16 Now, comparing this to previous  
17 projects that have been proposed over the  
18 years, we expect that there are going to  
19 be less impacts to environmental  
20 resources. So looking at the graphic on  
21 this slide illustrates why we believe  
22 those impacts will be significantly less  
23 for fish, wildlife, and wetlands.

24 This slide shows that the proposed  
25 2023 water management solution, compared

1 to the most recent proposal, which was in  
2 2020 -- and that 2020 proposal had a pump  
3 turn on of 87 feet, which would have  
4 restricted floodwaters to an elevation  
5 less than the two-year floodplain.

6 So when a unit had gotten up to the  
7 two-year floodplain under that 2020  
8 proposal, it would not have allowed water  
9 to reach above that elevation to provide  
10 benefits to fish, wildlife, and the  
11 wetland resources within the five-year  
12 floodplain.

13 Impacts to these resources by the 2020  
14 proposal that would have been realized  
15 year-round are depicted here in gray and  
16 also includes the area shown in red. For  
17 the 2023 proposal, this water management  
18 proposal that we have developed, impacts  
19 to fish, wildlife, wetlands within that  
20 five-year floodplain are shown only in the  
21 red, and these would occur only during the  
22 crop season.

23 It is also important to note that  
24 because we're allowing water to go up  
25 through to the five-year to the extent of



1 the five-year floodplain that we believe  
2 that this solution is designed for no  
3 conversion of wetlands within the  
4 five-year and two-year floodplains to  
5 conversion of those wetlands to  
6 non-wetlands.

7 However, there's going to be impacts,  
8 as James had indicated, and these impacts  
9 will be thoroughly evaluated. The three  
10 agencies, EPA, Fish and Wildlife Service,  
11 and the Corps, have agreed on what the  
12 geographic area for assessing those  
13 impacts will be.

14 We've also agreed on the assessment  
15 criteria and the scientifically approved  
16 methodologies and procedures to assess the  
17 impacts of fish, wildlife, wetlands, and  
18 other ecological resources. We'll go to  
19 the next slide. I'm going to turn it over  
20 Mr. Brister.

21 MR. BRISTER: So with any project  
22 that has impacts to these environmental  
23 resources, it requires compensatory  
24 mitigation to offset those project  
25 impacts.

1           The key components of our proposed  
2           approach is that compensatory mitigation  
3           will be in advance or concurrent with the  
4           project construction. Another key  
5           component is that all mitigation sites  
6           will be secured prior to those impacts.

7           A third component is that all  
8           mitigation sites will be approved by the  
9           three agencies, that being the Corps, Fish  
10          and Wildlife Service, and EPA. Another  
11          key aspect of the mitigation strategy is  
12          the development of a mitigation memorandum  
13          of understanding between those three  
14          agencies.

15          And this is to guide mitigation  
16          details regarding the development, review,  
17          approval, and oversight of the  
18          compensatory mitigation. Compensatory  
19          mitigation will be within or even outside  
20          the Yazoo River Basin, and it will include  
21          ecological restoration and enhancement  
22          projects.

23          And we're contemplating the  
24          construction of a series of wells in the  
25          Upper Yazoo Basin area to augment stream

1 flows to certain streams within the basin  
2 area to benefit fisheries and other  
3 aquatic resources.

4 I'm going to go to the next slide, and  
5 I'm going to turn it over to Stacey and  
6 Brian to finish this off with the next  
7 steps.

8 MS. JENSEN: All right. Thanks,  
9 everybody. Thanks to the team.

10 So, next steps, so we're here today  
11 and tomorrow to present to you all our  
12 joint draft preferred approach. And over  
13 the next -- course of the next few days,  
14 as well as the next month, we want to  
15 gather your questions. We want to gather  
16 your comments and input on our draft  
17 preferred approach. So that takes us  
18 through the month of May.

19 This presentation will be posted. We  
20 do have a project web page. That website  
21 will be available to you all. There's a  
22 handout that has the web page listed, and  
23 on that web page will be this  
24 presentation.

25 There's also a comments field box. So

1 if you do not fill out the comment card  
2 today or you still think about it and want  
3 to take some time to think about it, you  
4 can submit those comments directly on the  
5 web page to us.

6 And so, we'll take the month of May to  
7 refine our draft preferred approach based  
8 on your input, based on our continued  
9 technical work that we're doing over the  
10 course of this month. And then, at the  
11 end of June, we will finalize our  
12 preferred approach, our joint agency one.

13 And that will take us into June 30th  
14 here where we will deliver that and make  
15 public what that final preferred approach  
16 is.

17 Brian, anything else?

18 MR. FRAZER: Great. So thanks,  
19 Stacey. As Stacey said, when we came here  
20 in February, for those of you, I do see a  
21 number of people who were here in  
22 February, and I appreciate you coming back  
23 to hear what we want to present.

24 Again, this is our draft proposal  
25 approach. And we heard you in February,

1 and we went back with the team and worked  
2 out our proposal.

3 And what I would like to have folks do  
4 now is submit any comments to us or  
5 anything that you think that the Corps has  
6 missed in their preferred approach and  
7 what we can do in terms of finalizing this  
8 moving forward.

9 I think it's very important that the  
10 Corps meets its deadline per the MOU at  
11 the end of June, and your contribution  
12 would be critical for us moving forward.  
13 So as Stacey mentioned, any questions, any  
14 concerns, any comments, please let us hear  
15 what they are.

16 And with that, I think we can open it  
17 up for questions and comments.

18 MR. CONNOR: Yeah, absolutely, Brian.  
19 Thanks for leading us into that. So, once  
20 again, the floor is yours. Happy to take  
21 input now, happy to take input on an  
22 ongoing basis.

23 And while folks get ready, let me just  
24 make and reiterate a point that I think  
25 has been well-made, but I think it's

1           important. This is a plan. It's a  
2           comprehensive water management strategy.

3                   And while I don't think we've  
4           approached this particular issue before  
5           like this, it's not uncommon to what we do  
6           in many other places. Missouri River, the  
7           Corps, we have flood control systems, as  
8           well as navigational improvements. We  
9           operate pursuant to a plan about when we  
10          make releases of water, how we manage the  
11          system overall, and that's because of a  
12          lot of other environmental values,  
13          endangered species, issues that we have to  
14          address.

15                   No different than Florida Everglades.  
16          We're going through a massive process  
17          right now about how to operate Lake  
18          Okeechobee, as well as other new features,  
19          all subject to large infrastructure  
20          systems operating in a certain way to  
21          benefit a lot of other values.

22                   And then, lastly, every water system  
23          in the west has major infrastructure that  
24          is operated specifically to a plan that's  
25          been developed across multiple agencies to

1 balance water supply, environmental  
2 interests, other factors, flood control.

3 So I think we've taken that big  
4 concept of having to have a comprehensive  
5 strategy and working through that  
6 collaboratively and put it into this  
7 system. So how do we integrate  
8 infrastructure with operations, with  
9 mitigation, with other features in order  
10 to accomplish flood risk reduction and  
11 advance other values overall?

12 So I just thought that was -- bears  
13 mentioning, and that was just giving you  
14 an opportunity to line up or whatever it  
15 is you want to do to continue the  
16 conversation. We're here to listen.

17 MS. JENSEN: There's a couple of  
18 microphones in the room, or if you prefer  
19 to speak from where you're seated, just  
20 throw your hand up, and I'll come to you.

21 I just want to start off by saying how  
22 much we appreciate the work y'all have put  
23 in in the last couple of months. This has  
24 been truly amazing how y'all have  
25 expedited this, because you're talking to

1 an audience that's been waiting for 40, 50  
2 years for this. We know it was a lot of  
3 work, and we really appreciate it.

4 Y'all have taken an extremely  
5 courageous step in recommending this  
6 larger pump than the previous one. It  
7 goes against all of the red tape and the  
8 politics that have haunted this project  
9 for the last 50 years.

10 And some of the people may be  
11 surprised that we're coming up with this  
12 larger pump, But actually that's a  
13 full-circle moment. Because the original  
14 pump project, back in the '70s and '80s,  
15 was a 25,000 cubic feet pump. That was  
16 the one recommended by the NED Plan, The  
17 National Economic Development Plan.

18 And when you look at the Huxtable  
19 plant, which is currently the largest  
20 backwater, it's on a 2,000 square mile  
21 basis, and it's a 12,200 cubic feet per  
22 second pump. Our basin is double that  
23 size, over 4,000 square miles, and it  
24 justifies a 25,000 cubic feet pump.

25 And I just want to say how courageous



1 y'all are to make that decision. Are  
2 there some compensations for the set  
3 points that we're going to -- trigger  
4 points that we're going to have? Sure.  
5 And we can see from your presentation that  
6 y'all have put a lot of work and a lot of  
7 thought into that, and we just, you know,  
8 want to thank you for that.

9 The only thing I have to say really,  
10 concerns, is that possibly this allowing  
11 the gates to stay open to 78 feet and  
12 allowing the Yazoo to back into it. There  
13 is some concerns for the Eagle Lake area,  
14 where I live, because our lake is managed  
15 between 75 and 76.9 summer and winter pool  
16 if we allow the backwater -- you know,  
17 backwater, the Yazoo back into it to 78,  
18 we're not going to be able to control the  
19 level of our lake.

20 That sounds like it's already been  
21 under consideration. I hope you land on a  
22 number that's closer to 74, 75 so that  
23 we'll still have some control over the  
24 lake, but that would be my only concern.

25 The only other thing I want to say

1           about this that saddens me about this  
2           whole project is that Mr. Fred Ballard was  
3           not here to see this day. He spent 32  
4           years pleading with the levee board to  
5           sponsor this project, and he didn't make  
6           it. He died a couple -- about a month  
7           ago.

8           And I just hate that he's not here to  
9           see this study, because he would surely  
10          appreciate it. Thank you.

11          MR. ADCOCK: Good afternoon. I'm  
12          Clay Adcock from Holly Bluff, and I want  
13          to thank, as he said, the three  
14          agencies -- it's a lot easier than to go  
15          through -- to finally right the wrong  
16          that's been done to us for 50 years.  
17          Although it took a little longer than it  
18          should have, we all thank you for being  
19          willing to do the work required to find an  
20          acceptable solution to our manmade  
21          flooding problems.

22          While we are all appreciative and  
23          happy about the solution, I'd like to  
24          bring something to your attention, and I  
25          hope you would consider it as you move

1 forward with this plan. With the  
2 implementation of this plan, it seems  
3 you're attempting, during the cropping  
4 season, to not exceed 90-foot elevation in  
5 the basin.

6 At a pump turned on at 90 feet, that  
7 won't accomplish this across the entire  
8 basin. Y'all may be aware of that, I'm  
9 not sure, but I want to make sure you are  
10 aware of that. Holly Bluff, where I'm  
11 from, is a large, flat area with about  
12 100,000 plus acres of forested state and  
13 federally owned lands, in addition to the  
14 privately owned forested lands.

15 Because of the elevation and headwater  
16 slope, during a typical flooding  
17 situation, there will be approximately 3  
18 to 4 feet of additional rainwater pooling  
19 at Holly Bluff before it gets to the  
20 Steele Bayou gates and the pump. An  
21 example of this occurrence happened this  
22 year on April the 7th, 2023, with the  
23 Steele Bayou gates closed, the Yazoo  
24 backwater stage at Steele Bayou peaked at  
25 87.3 feet.

1                   On April the 11th of 2023, the Steele  
2                   Bayou gates remained closed, Sunflower  
3                   River gauge at Holly Bluff peaked at 91.5  
4                   feet. That's 4.26 feet of additional  
5                   water in that pool that had not made it to  
6                   the gates, and the pumps wouldn't even  
7                   turn on. So we've got an additional 4 to  
8                   5 feet of pooling water at Holly Bluff  
9                   that wouldn't be affected by the pumps.

10                  So if you went to a 90-foot Steele  
11                  Bayou turn-on, the area with arguably the  
12                  largest, most environmentally sensitive  
13                  portion of the Yazoo basin would be  
14                  subject to a flood elevation of 93 to 95  
15                  feet.

16                  This could be remedied by lower turn  
17                  on elevation to Steele Bayou, maybe 86,  
18                  87, for a temporary time to get -- to  
19                  increase the flow to get that water to  
20                  Steele Bayou. And the hydraulic  
21                  experts -- I'm no expert in this -- but it  
22                  could be turned on to get -- to reach that  
23                  90 foot elevation across the basin, and  
24                  not just at Steele Bayou pumps.

25                  Please consider allowing the Corps of

1 Engineers, the hydraulic water expert, the  
2 latitude in their pump operational  
3 policies and procedures to achieve a more  
4 environmentally sensitive elevation of  
5 90 feet across the basin and not just at  
6 Steele Bayou gates.

7 The South Delta environment humbly  
8 thanks you and your respective agencies  
9 for your compassionate and concern in  
10 expediting this viable solution to our  
11 flooding problems. Thank you, and please  
12 consider my suggestions as you move  
13 forward.

14 MR. CONNOR: I got to say, I've done  
15 a lot of public meetings in my career, and  
16 I've always been impressed, and I am just  
17 once again, at the level of technical  
18 depth and scientific, you know, facts and  
19 figures that you all bring to these  
20 discussions. So I very much appreciate  
21 that.

22 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you. I really  
23 appreciate what all y'all did. It kind of  
24 made me -- I can kind of sleep better now,  
25 you know, that y'all hadn't forgot about

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1 us, and I really appreciate that. Because  
2 it's been many years on my parents -- they  
3 gone on in, but my kids, they still there  
4 and stuff, and my wife.

5 But I really appreciate what y'all  
6 doing, that you consider us to come back  
7 and listen to us one more time.

8 It really is a true story what we've  
9 been through. Don't nobody want to go  
10 through that. So I really thank God for  
11 y'all that y'all -- we got hope. Just  
12 don't ever give up. Keep trusting and  
13 keep the faith up. That's all I got to  
14 say. Just thank you and keep going.

15 I'm going to be right here. I would  
16 like to do something. When they get ready  
17 to start, I'd like to be there when they  
18 (indiscernible), I'd like to be right  
19 there. It's just like history to me, so  
20 I'd be right there. Thank God for y'all.

21 UNIDENTIFIED: Hello, how are y'all?  
22 Thank y'all for coming back. Very glad to  
23 see you here. "Very glad to see you" has  
24 taken on a whole new meaning for a lot of  
25 us over the past few weeks.

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1                   What impresses me most about this  
2                   group is that you came in, and you  
3                   listened, and you came back when you said  
4                   you would. To see you here, you're still  
5                   in these seats taking notes, it tells us  
6                   that you are listening, and we are very  
7                   thankful for that.

8                   So please take those notes and go back  
9                   and tweak just a little bit for us,  
10                  another inch or two here, an inch there.  
11                  I've been talking to a lot of people in  
12                  the community that are not able to be  
13                  living in the community right now and back  
14                  and forth from Greenville to Vicksburg.  
15                  Everyone I'm talking to, from the highest  
16                  up to the lowest of the low, are  
17                  continually asking, "What about the  
18                  pumps?"

19                  We've been through this tornado, and  
20                  we desperately want our people back home.  
21                  I want to be able to give them a little  
22                  more hope. And just the fact that they've  
23                  been through this tornado, but they're  
24                  still asking, "What about the pumps?"

25                  Every interview I've done in the past

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1 five or six weeks, every time I've  
2 mentioned the pumps, that's been cut out  
3 of every single entry. So thank you for  
4 being here. Thank you for truly  
5 listening, and we look forward to seeing  
6 you in June. Thank you.

7 MR. HOLLIS: Thank y'all. I'm Paul  
8 Hollis. I'm also a resident of Rolling  
9 Fork. I'm going to try not to be as  
10 emotional as Tracy, but one thing you have  
11 to know about Tracy and how strong she is,  
12 Tracy lost her complete business.

13 She has worked every day since that  
14 day serving people, feeding people out of  
15 her own pocket, along with some donations.  
16 But what this has done, just like we hope  
17 for Rolling Fork, we need some hope. We  
18 need to see a future. We've been gut  
19 punched again with this tornado.

20 And as much as you've seen on TV,  
21 until you've been to Rolling Fork, you  
22 can't truly realize the devastation of our  
23 small town, the largest town in the south  
24 Delta. But this gives us hope, and we're  
25 working to have hope for Rolling Fork,



1           too.

2                   I do want to thank y'all for working  
3           together. This means so much to us. When  
4           I first heard that y'all were going to  
5           work together on this project, finally in  
6           the same room together, and realize that  
7           what you've done is giving a project, a  
8           proposed project, that has hope for our  
9           community, it's sound for the environment,  
10          although I'm sure you're going to hear  
11          from some people that say it is -- that  
12          everything that you proposed here  
13          tonight -- and we love the environment.

14                   And I'm a farmer, and most farmers,  
15          all farmers I know, love the environment.  
16          They're conservationists. We can't farm  
17          without the land. We want to conserve  
18          that land. And this project has given us  
19          hope that we can do the right thing, not  
20          only for our community, but for the  
21          environment and everything that we need  
22          for our little part of the world.

23                   And that comes from people that live  
24          here. That comes from people that spend  
25          every day here. That doesn't come from

1 people that don't live here that think  
2 they know what we need. And I thank y'all  
3 very much.

4 UNIDENTIFIED: I just have a couple  
5 of questions I'd like to get answered.  
6 Mr. Brister said that the pumps would be  
7 located adjacent to the control structure.  
8 Which control structure?

9 MR. BRISTER: The Steele Bayou gates.

10 UNIDENTIFIED: Back in Steele Bayou?

11 MR. BRISTER: Correct.

12 UNIDENTIFIED: Because at one time,  
13 it moved upstream.

14 MR. BRISTER: Correct. Steele Bayou  
15 gates.

16 UNIDENTIFIED: The other is, what's a  
17 realistic timetable for operation pumps?  
18 If we get an agreement in June 30th, we  
19 move forward from there, six years, five  
20 years?

21 MS. JENSEN: So yeah. We will roll  
22 out our final preferred approach at the  
23 end of June, and then we move to the  
24 environmental compliance report that we  
25 have to comply with the Clean Water Act,

1 NEPA, that sort of thing.

2 So the Corps will expeditiously work  
3 to draft that report, making sure it  
4 checks the boxes on all of our legal  
5 requirements, and then the project is  
6 subject to the appropriations process.

7 UNIDENTIFIED: I didn't hear the  
8 years.

9 MR. CONNOR: We're moving  
10 expeditiously, step by step. And I think,  
11 you know, one, we got to finish and take  
12 the input on the preferred approach. Then  
13 we're very mindful of the need to do  
14 environmental compliance. We don't want  
15 to get this high centered on legal issues.

16 So we want to be thorough and do our  
17 work. And then, you know, it will be  
18 subject. I do not believe we need to go  
19 through another authorization process.  
20 That's very significant. So it's about  
21 moving forward with appropriations and  
22 whatever project we end up with that I  
23 think people will be focused on getting  
24 that done as expeditiously as possible.

25 We understand risks here, even better

1 than other places, because of what you've  
2 experienced.

3 UNIDENTIFIED: Let's say from  
4 breaking ground to operating funds, is  
5 that a four year timetable?

6 MR. BRISTER: So short answer is, we  
7 don't know. I mean, we've got to get the  
8 final plan, and then it's subject to us  
9 getting appropriations. Depends on how  
10 much appropriations we get.

11 MR. CONNOR: And we're going to be  
12 cautious about being pre-decisional about  
13 what that final plan is. We have a  
14 proposed plan. So if we sit here and say  
15 a four-year construction window, that  
16 presupposes that we've decided on what  
17 that final plan is. So just kind of  
18 understand, we're trying to be by the book  
19 here.

20 MS. GARLAND: Hey, y'all. My name is  
21 Victoria Garland. I'm from the Onward  
22 area just south of Rolling Fork. We just  
23 want to thank y'all for coming and  
24 actually coming back to see us and seeing  
25 what you'll do.

1           The plan looks great. I really do  
2           agree a lot with what Clay said earlier.  
3           Looking at cut-off levels, that's very  
4           crucial to our area. Maybe a more  
5           detailed map that y'all shared up close so  
6           we can maybe see what areas are actually  
7           set for the pumps.

8           There are a lot of farmers right now  
9           that just couldn't be here today. It's a  
10          crucial part of planting season, and we  
11          have a rain coming, pretty much a week of  
12          rain. And so, they are really trying to  
13          get there and get it done. And so, a lot  
14          of them aren't able to be here.

15          If y'all will provide that address for  
16          the comments, that would be great, because  
17          I know they have a lot of concerns, and  
18          they wish they could be here, but a lot of  
19          them just couldn't. Thank y'all.

20          MR. BRISTER: So what she brought up.  
21          So in the back of the room, there's a  
22          one-pager that we've got our website on  
23          it, but, also, you can Google the  
24          Vicksburg District, and on the front page,  
25          there's a link that goes to those. Okay?

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1           Laura has them right now. Laura, you  
2           may want to just start passing out a  
3           couple of them. Yes. And there's also  
4           larger maps. They're back here, that we  
5           can talk about when we're done.

6           MR. BRAXTON: Hello. My name is  
7           Robby Braxton. I'm a third-generation  
8           farmer. Lived here all my life.

9           Been fighting 40 years for this. I  
10          appreciate everything. That people show  
11          back up when they say they will is a big  
12          deal. The pumps themselves are the  
13          biggest part of the planting period. If  
14          they're not there, this place doesn't  
15          work.

16          I would beg to differ on your numbers,  
17          on your start dates, when the pump comes  
18          on, you know, that kind of stuff. Your  
19          March the 25th number on your date, it  
20          is -- if you're going to do it  
21          specifically for farming season, you have  
22          to go back to, then you have to go back to  
23          the farming part of it.

24          When you're dealing with federal crop,  
25          crop insurance stuff, the plant date on

1 corn is March 1st. If you've still got  
2 water and not going to pump -- even turn  
3 the pumps on to get the water off of that  
4 particular patch of ground until the 25th,  
5 then we're already a month late. Please  
6 consider that.

7 And, again, my personal opinion is  
8 about 3 -- you're about 3 feet off of the  
9 numbers. Again, that's a personal  
10 opinion. Any help -- six inches is a big  
11 deal. It just is. It covers a lot of  
12 ground. I appreciate it. And, again,  
13 thank y'all for everything y'all have  
14 done. Thanks.

15 MR. CONNOR: Anybody else?

16 UNIDENTIFIED: I was going to fill  
17 out my questionnaire or questions and send  
18 it to y'all, but I was here at the last  
19 meeting and asked some questions about the  
20 (indiscernible) loss and some other  
21 concerns. I even had that on my  
22 questionnaire card that I filled out and  
23 never heard anything from anybody.

24 And not that it's ultimately very  
25 important. It is concerning and all that,

1 but if we submit these questions I have,  
2 you know, I want to get a response for  
3 those, as well. I haven't heard anything  
4 from anybody. And I think when you check  
5 in and sign in here and fill this out, our  
6 email address is available. I haven't  
7 heard any answers to any of our questions  
8 or concerns. Or at least I haven't. I  
9 don't know if anybody else in the room got  
10 a response, but I didn't get any.

11 MR. CONNOR: No, I think it's a fair  
12 point. I think we've certainly taken the  
13 input and incorporated that, and I think,  
14 you know, we're always thinking about this  
15 as the response is incorporated into the  
16 proposal. But some of you do have very  
17 specific questions about issues of  
18 concern.

19 So I think it's a good and fair point  
20 to say we should try and communicate  
21 answers to those questions. I appreciate  
22 you raising that.

23 MS. JENSEN: Yeah, that's helpful.  
24 We definitely, for the last engagement and  
25 those questions we did, as Secretary



1 Connor said, it fed directly into this  
2 draft preferred approach. If there's gaps  
3 or things that we didn't address, please  
4 follow up.

5 And we will be providing a summary of  
6 all the comments. That will be posted on  
7 the web page. So we are taking notes, and  
8 we will definitely provide a summary of  
9 what we've heard, and that will be  
10 transparent for others who aren't able to  
11 attend, as well.

12 But we'll take that input into  
13 account, whatever questions you have, and  
14 perhaps we can develop some common FAQs or  
15 something that we've heard certain  
16 questions on that we can follow up on the  
17 web page.

18 UNIDENTIFIED: Well, apparently the  
19 Warren County Tax Assessor must know y'all  
20 will get this -- to push through  
21 (indiscernible - crowd laughing)  
22 reassessment.

23 MR. FRAZER: That's an adamant "no  
24 comment."

25 MR. WHEELER: My name is Nott

1 Wheeler. I am Vice President of the  
2 Mississippi Levee Board, and I spoke to  
3 y'all in February. And I truly  
4 appreciate, our whole board appreciates  
5 you making this historic effort to get  
6 something done for people in the south  
7 Delta.

8 Since the moth balling of the Eudora  
9 floodway, the south Delta has been waiting  
10 for a solution to the problem that the  
11 Eudora floodway probably would have  
12 solved. And here they still are.

13 You've heard from the -- you're  
14 hearing from the local people, and they  
15 need help. And you've heard all the  
16 stories. Now, on top of that, hit by  
17 devastating weather with the tornadoes and  
18 the damage.

19 The south Delta still desperately,  
20 even more so than before, needs an  
21 opportunity for economic development, and  
22 they really can't expect it without being  
23 rid of the scourge of every-year  
24 floodwater. It's all part of the plan.

25 And this plan that y'all are proposing

1 can help do that, can help people Rolling  
2 Fork and Silver City rebuild. And I just  
3 want to say personally, for someone who  
4 lives up in Bolivar County, that I  
5 appreciate it, and my constituents  
6 appreciate it, and we're willing to do --  
7 the levee board's willing to do everything  
8 it can to help this process go forward.

9 Another thing I want to mention before  
10 I sit down, as Anne mentioned, the  
11 original pump project was for 25 feet.  
12 Original pump project also was designed to  
13 cut off at 80 feet. So these people in  
14 here have given up 10 feet, 13 feet in  
15 some instances of protection. And on the  
16 area like the backwater, 13 feet is a huge  
17 amount of land.

18 And this is what they've sacrificed,  
19 and they're still here thanking you for  
20 what you're doing. So, once again, I said  
21 this before, I want to commend the Biden  
22 administration for being the people, you  
23 people, the staff in your offices,  
24 everybody involved with this process, to  
25 be the ones to be here on this historic

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1 moment to get this done for the south  
2 Delta. And I appreciate you for that.  
3 Thank you.

4 MR. CONNOR: Thank you. Well, let me  
5 just say, once again, I'm going to start  
6 talking. I'll turn it over to Jeaneanne  
7 and Matt, but if anybody wants to get up  
8 in that timeframe, feel free to do so.  
9 But it feels like we're wrapping up here.

10 So we appreciate the opportunity.  
11 Once again, I would say to the last point,  
12 the context where this is helpful,  
13 obviously, the facts, the figures, the  
14 input, technical input, other input, need  
15 is always helpful to hear. And we're  
16 going to continue to press forward along  
17 the timeline that we set out.

18 I think we're in a good position  
19 because of the really hard -- where I get  
20 to get up here and be a talking head, but  
21 folks in the back and other folks here are  
22 the ones who are really rolling up their  
23 sleeves and doing a lot of good,  
24 impressive technical work. And I just  
25 want to acknowledge my thanks for you all

1 getting us here today and to taking this  
2 input.

3 And then, you know, it's a tight  
4 timeline to take input and then come back  
5 in by the end of June, but we're committed  
6 to doing just that. So, really, you all  
7 spend so much time providing input,  
8 participating in these public processes,  
9 and it is really important.

10 So I appreciate the kind thoughts and  
11 words today. It's the least we can do,  
12 given the level of input and participation  
13 you all have had.

14 Jeaneanne?

15 MS. GETTLE: Thank you, Mr. Connor.

16 Well, I, too, want to just thank you  
17 for showing back up here today, and I  
18 appreciate the thanks that we showed back  
19 up, but it's as important that you all  
20 showed back up here today.

21 And I just wanted to say that, you  
22 know, EPA came to this committed to the  
23 science. That's our job is to look at the  
24 science and to use that to ensure that we  
25 protect human health and the environment.

1           That's our mission, and that's what we  
2           came here to do, and that's what I think  
3           our scientists have done in this. Thank  
4           you.

5           MR. STICKLER: I'll just add quickly  
6           how much I appreciate you all sharing your  
7           knowledge with us today. I have a lot of  
8           admiration for your patience and  
9           persistence and, again, look forward to  
10          working together with our partners at the  
11          Corps and EPA on this.

12          MS. JENSEN: All right. Thank you  
13          all.

14          So at this point, we did bring, as we  
15          heard from our last engagement, the whole  
16          federal family. It is a privilege as a  
17          federal family to be able to be here for  
18          this. And we talked about our draft  
19          preferred approach for the flood risk  
20          reduction, but there are many other  
21          programs and services that the federal  
22          family can offer to do just that and move  
23          your community forward.

24          So, at this point, you can get up and  
25          talk to the rest of the federal family or

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1           us about any other additional questions  
2           you have or inquiries about other programs  
3           and services they can offer to all of you.  
4           Welcome.

5                   (MEETING CONCLUDED AT 3:20 P.M.)

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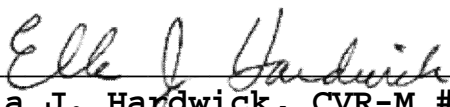
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CERTIFICATE OF COURT REPORTER

I, Ella J. Hardwick, CVR-M, #1749, Court Reporter and Notary Public, in and for the State of Mississippi, hereby certify that the foregoing contains a true and correct transcript, to the best of my ability, as taken by me in the aforementioned matter at the time and place heretofore stated.

I further certify that under the authority vested in me by the State of Mississippi that the witness was placed under oath by me to truthfully answer all questions in the matter. I further certify that I am not in the employ of or related to any counsel or party in this matter and have no interest, monetary or otherwise, in the final outcome of this matter.

Witness my signature and seal this the 22nd day of May, 2023.

  
Ella J. Hardwick, CVR-M #1749