

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

2

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

4

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

5

6 Jeaneanne Gettle, Deputy Regional Administrator,
EPA Region 4

7

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

9

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

10

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

12

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

13

14 Clay Miller, US Environmental Protection Agency

15 James Austin, US Fish and Wildlife Service

16 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,

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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.

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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

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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

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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,

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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.

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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

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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,

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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

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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,

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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

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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.

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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

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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,

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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.

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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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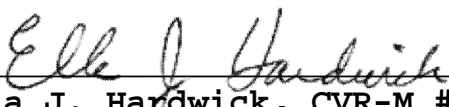
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1 CERTIFICATE OF COURT REPORTER

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

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

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

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19 
20 Ella J. Hardwick, CVR-M #1749
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