

U.S. Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Mississippi)
Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee
Review of FY2021 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Budget Request

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Assistant Secretary James and Lieutenant General Semonite, thank you for your good leadership and dedicated contributions to our nation's water resources infrastructure. I will focus my time today on a problem you are both familiar with: perpetual flooding in the South Mississippi Delta.

I am grateful for your attention to this issue, and for the progress made thus far. Still, I cannot stress enough the importance of implementing a permanent solution as soon as possible. We simply cannot sustain this flooding. Instead of carrying out a long-term solution specifically authorized by Congress, we continue to spend tax dollars on damages and repairs, which could have otherwise been prevented.

To understand the frustrations of my constituents adequately, it is necessary to provide a brief history of this complex, long-overdue flood control effort.

With the Flood Control Act of 1941, the Federal government committed to a compromise to make improvements on the Arkansas and Louisiana side of the Mississippi River, which would undoubtedly cause more flooding on the Mississippi side. In return, Congress also committed to flood protection improvements for a 630,000-acre area in the South Mississippi Delta, referred to as the Yazoo Backwater Area.

Authorized improvements consist of:

- Levees and floodgates to keep out floodwaters from the Mississippi and Yazoo Rivers;
- Drainage channels to allow interior rivers and streams to flow out; and
- Pumping stations to remove water trapped inside the levee and floodgate system when the river is high, floodgates are closed, and interior rivers and streams have no exit.

All of these features have been completed, except for the pumping station for the Mississippi Delta. What the Federal government has essentially created with hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars is a 630,000-acre bathtub.

After many years of studies, analysis, and examination of various alternatives, the Army Corps of Engineers recommended a plan for a pumping station in 2007 consisting of structural and non-structural features. The Environmental Protection Agency halted that plan in 2008 due to concerns over the potential impacts to wetlands at the proposed location.

What has happened since then: Catastrophic flooding has occurred in the Yazoo Backwater Area nine out of the 12 years since 2008. Population and employment across the six-county area has plummeted. More than \$300 million in Federal Crop Insurance indemnities have been paid to the six backwater counties for those flood years, which is a mere fraction of the total taxpayer dollars spent. Homes, roads, bridges, and other public infrastructure has been lost. The environment and wildlife have taken a beating.

Last year, we experienced one of the worst backwater floods on record. Approximately 548,000 acres flooded. That equates to 856 square miles—more than 12 times the size of the District of Columbia. The vast majority of the area remained flooded for 181 consecutive days—about six months. This is happening again as we speak.

The toll has been significant.

- Three of my constituents tragically lost their life in last year's flood.
- More than 680 homes were destroyed or damaged.
- Roughly, 231,000 acres of cropland were left unplanted or destroyed by the floodwaters.
- Nearly \$84 million in Federal Crop Insurance indemnities were paid, which does not begin to cover the estimated total crop damage of \$800 million.
- FEMA has spent \$65 million in public and individual assistance.
- 317,000 acres of timberland were damaged or lost, most of which is owned by the U.S. Forest Service or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Hunting season was closed. That is a big deal in Mississippi, too.
- An entire generation of wildlife was lost.
- The unemployment rate in the region rose by 3 percent.
- The list goes on.

A pumping station would not have completely prevented the effects of last year's flood or prior years' flooding, but the damages would have been drastically reduced. Thanks to your great leadership and your strong leadership under this Administration, area residents now have hope.

The Corps has the resources it needs to move the ball forward on a new proposed flood control solution and complete all required environmental reviews. The Corps has been working diligently with its agency counterparts to ensure that any new proposal will benefit wetlands and the environment.

Groups that have been historically opposed to improved flood protection for the area, which describe themselves as promoters of wildlife, the environment, and outdoor recreation ironically enough, seem to have forgotten that EPA stated the following in its 2008 Final Determination: *"EPA recognizes that pumps are often an important and appropriate component of flood control projects. EPA continues to support the goal of providing flood protection for the residents of the Mississippi Delta."*

I would also like to note that there are currently 22 federally-funded pumping stations within a 200-mile radius of the Yazoo Backwater Area, so pumps are not a new concept.

- **Assistant Secretary James and Lieutenant General Semonite, would you agree that flood control projects are not fully effective until they are complete?**
- **Will you commit to ensuring that the Corps of Engineers advances this effort as swiftly and effectively as possible?**