Mississippi LEVEE BOARD
Where people come first.

75th Anniversary
1927 FLOOD
How far have we come?

...and Now

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A MESSAGE from the Chief Engineer

The Significance of The Great Flood

by Jim Wanamaker

The 75th anniversary of the Great 1927 Flood is upon us, an event which ravaged the Delta and forever changed the region. The members of the Mississippi Levee Board and I thought it appropriate to commemorate this historic moment with this brochure. If there is one important lesson we can learn today from this cataclysmic event, which took place 75 years ago, April 21st, it is that we can never rest easy about the power of the great Mississippi River. That is why the Mississippi Levee Board has as our mission the protection of the lives and property of Delta citizens. It is a charge we take with full earnestness and dedication.

As you will see in this publication, the Mississippi Levee Board is involved in many different projects and activities to insure that the Delta is safe from flooding. From flood control projects to outreach educational programs, we have never been more active in our 137-year history than we are at the Levee Board today. Strong opposition from extremist environmental groups to providing flood protection to the Mississippi Delta area make it more crucial today than ever before that facts, not fears, are presented before the public about the work we do.

We hope you will find this publication interesting and informative. We also hope you will join us in our mission to keep Delta residents informed, safe and protected so that another 1927 Flood will never happen again.

Jim Wanamaker
Chief Engineer

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WHAT WE DO... a brief history of the Levee Board

As the Mississippi River moves toward the Gulf of Mexico, it divides its flood plain into a number of large basins, each bounded on one side by the bluff of the valley wall and on the other by the high ridges or natural levees of the river itself. The Yazoo-Mississippi Delta is such a basin. Before man's involvement, these basins along the river flooded when the river exceeded bank full relieving the channel of water it could not carry.

The Yazoo-Mississippi Delta lies at the neck of a funnel at which point the Mississippi River drains 31 states and two provinces of Canada. The drainage area served covers an area extending from New York to Montana. Forty one percent of the United States drains past Vicksburg at the south end of the Delta.

Almost 200 years of effort have gone into relieving the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta from periodic overflow flooding the Mississippi River to make the region safe for residents to develop industry, agriculture, and to build lives in thriving and growing cities.

The efforts to contain flooding from the Mississippi River and from interior streams has been and continues to be the responsibility of the region's elected levee boards.

The Mississippi Levee Board has maintained its efforts against the threat of flooding continuously since 1865.

The Mississippi Levee District, governed by the Board of Mississippi Levee Commissioners, has maintained its efforts against the threat of flooding continuously since 1865.
WHAT we are doing...

The Mississippi Constitution charges the Levee Boards with responsibility to provide protection of lives and property to the citizens of the Delta from floods from the Mississippi River. Following the Great Flood of 1927, Congress recognized that the floodwaters from 41% of the Continental United States drain down the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico and passed the Flood Control Act of 1928 which authorized the Mississippi River & Tributaries Project (MR&T) which included a uniform levee system. Following the 1973 Flood, the Corps of Engineers determined that the levee system could not pass the Project Design Flood. The Levee Enlargement Project in Mississippi includes 69 miles of deficient levee beginning just below Greenville and extending toward Vicksburg with a maximum enlargement of 8’ in the vicinity of Mayersville, MS. The Mississippi Levee Board currently has 18.1 miles of deficient levee under contract. By 2003 another 17.3 miles will be under contract.

The Flood Control Act of 1944 authorized channel improvements for flood control on the Big Sunflower River and its tributaries. In 1950, the Mississippi Legislature authorized the Delta’s two Levee Boards to participate as the local sponsor for the Corps of Engineers on interior stream projects. The Mississippi Levee Board has the responsibility to maintain 350 miles of interior streams within its district. The Big Sunflower River & Tributaries Project was initiated in the 1940’s and completed in the 1960’s. It included 633 miles of channel improvement. In the early 1990’s, following several floods on the Bogue Phalia, the Corps determined that due to sediment accumulation, major maintenance is required. The Big Sunflower River Maintenance Project will restore the authorized flood control capacity to approximately 130 miles of the original 633 miles of channel. Additional work along Steele Bayou was authorized in the Flood Control Act of 1965 to provide a higher level of protection to the City of Greenville than achieved in the original project. The Upper Steele Bayou Project has been completed through Greenville with work remaining in the Yazoo Wildlife Refuge.

The Flood Control Act of 1941 authorized the design and construction of the Yazoo Backwater Project to protect the South Delta of Mississippi. This projects included a combination of levees, drainage structures and pumps. The Steele Bayou and Little Sunflower drainage structures were completed in 1969 and 1975, respectfully. The Yazoo Backwater levees were completed in 1978. During highwater, when flood water from the Mississippi River backs up the Yazoo River, the Yazoo Backwater Levee, along with the closed drainage structures, prevents the backwater from entering the South Delta. The Connecting Channel was constructed and completed in 1978 to connect the Big and Little Sunflower Rivers, Deer Creek and Steele Bayou, bringing water from 4093 square miles of the Delta to the Steele Bayou Drainage Structure where a pumping plant can be constructed. During highwater situations, when the gates are closed on the drainage structures to keep out the Mississippi River floodwaters, pumps are needed to evacuate rainfall that falls in the Delta which flows downstream and has no outlet to the river. The pumps are the last remaining unconstructed feature of the Yazoo Backwater Project.

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In various brochures, the Mississippi Levee Board has educated the public about the truth concerning DDT and dredging, levee enlargement and berms projects and the Yazoo Backwater Project and Big Sunflower River Maintenance Project. Issued over the past year, these brochures contain in-depth information on the many projects we are working on. To request a copy of these timely reports, please call the Mississippi Levee Board office at 662-334-4813.
The proposed dredging project neither exacerbates nor ameliorates these risks. This organization is the same group that subcontracted the work on the Hudson River Study for the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA endorsed dredging the Hudson River to remove contaminated sediments. The Hudson River is very similar to the Big Sunflower River. Menzie, Cura, & Associates Inc. concluded, “The proposed dredging project is www.mvk.usace.army.mil.

The Board of Mississippi Levee Commissioners will continue to work to see that the citizens of the Mississippi Delta are afforded protection authorized by the Congress. This protection is much too critical to be railroaded by erroneous information and media partiality.

Fred A. Ballard Jr., is president of the Mississippi Levee Board Greenville. For more information, the Web site is www.msleveeboard.com and the Corps of Engineers’ Web site at www.msleveeboard.com.

I am writing in response to the published letter “Corps Mission Was Completed Long Ago” (February 7, 2002). It is very apparent that the author, Mr. Marcus, lives on children to the school bus in a boat due to flooding. All projects constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers originate from people who have a problem. These people contact their Congressional delegation which provides authority for the Corps of Engineers to complete a study and recommend a solution. All projects constructed by the Corps of Engineers must be authorized by the Congress and meet a test of providing at least $11 in benefits for every dollar spent. This is the only agency whose projects must meet this criterion.

The solution is simple. We need a pump that will evacuate the Delta’s storm water when the gates are closed just like our pumps in Greenville protect us. The Yazoo Backwater Project was authorized in 1941. Every feature of this project has been completed except for the pumps. Work on the Big Sunflower is currently being delayed while the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality waits for a decision from the Mississippi Supreme Court on a petition filed May 11 to halt the en route to the Gulf of Mexico. Two projects vital in providing this solution are currently working diligently to see that our water moves safely through the remainder of the Delta into the Mississippi River eventually to the Gulf of Mexico. The Bolivar Commercial - Letter to the Editor

The frequent heavy rains experienced over the last three months have emphasized the importance of the pumps operated by the city of Cleveland to evacuate floodwaters. These pumps allow Cleveland to pump water out of the developed areas of the city into channels that move southward into the Bogue Phalia and the Big Sunflower River. In taking with city officials, they have expressed concern that Cleveland’s pumps are not working. As citizens of Bolivar County, we are sure that everyone realizes the importance of these pumps in providing needed protection to homes and businesses.

As pointed out above, water pumped out of Cleveland goes into tributaries of the Bogue Phalia and the Big Sunflower River and heads south. The Board of Mississippi Levee Commissioners is currently working diligently to see that our water moves safely through the remainder of the Delta into the Mississippi River eventually to the Gulf of Mexico. Two projects vital in providing this protection are experiencing twofold opposition from the environmental community.

The Big Sunflower River Maintenance Project is designed solely to rectify flows on the Big Sunflower River system by May 12 so that the channel will carry our water safely downstream. This is what they were designed to do and the project was completed in the mid 90’s. The same people in the environmental community who oppose the dredging on the Big Sunflower River system support dredging the Hudson River to remove contaminants. It is difficult for us to understand how dredging can be good for the Hudson River and bad for the Sunflower River. When this water passes on down through the Delta, it enters the Mississippi River through the Steele Bayou Outlet Structure. When the Mississippi River is high, the Steele Bayou Outlet Structure is closed, preventing the Mississippi River from backing into the Delta. At the same time, it also closes the outlet for our floodwater, resulting in flooding of the south Delta area. The solution is simple. We need a pump that will evacuate the Delta’s storm water when the gates are closed just like our pumps in Cleveland protect us. The Yazoo Backwater Project was authorized in 1941. Every feature of this project has been completed except for the pumps. When this work is finished, we will have a solution to our problem.

The next time it rains in Cleveland and we begin to wonder if the pumps are working, let us remember that our fellow citizens downstream are waiting for a maintenance project to get out of court and a pump project to be built that was authorized 60 years ago. We ask that citizens of Cleveland and Bolivar County support these two projects in any way they can.

For additional information, contact the Mississippi Levee Board at 662-334-4813 or visit our web site at www.msleveeboard.com.
ECONOMIC BENEFITS...

In addition to the life, property and wildlife protection the Mississippi Levee Board provides, their ongoing projects also supplies an impressive economic boost to the Delta.

The Mississippi River & Tributaries (MR & T) Project employs countless Delta workers on various job sites. Item 502L, a 7.3 mile long conventional levee enlargement in northern Issaquena County, is an $8 million project which is 94% complete; and Item 496L, the 9.6 mile environmentally-friendly levee enlargement project centered around Mayersville, MS is a $26 million job which is 81% complete. These two important construction contracts that the Mississippi Levee Board has sponsored bring much needed work to an economically challenged area. Levee enlargement work will continue with an additional 50 miles of deficient levee to be raised with completion slated for 2031.
We’ve come a long way in flood control since The Great Flood of 1927. But there’s still much more to be done. Please join us at the Mississippi Levee Board in ensuring the safety and protection of all Delta citizens.

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