



OUACHITA RIVER FOUNDATION

a non-profit organization

“Dedicated to the preservation of the beauty and history of the Ouachita River and surrounding tributaries”

www.ouachitariver.org

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS LEVEE / TREE REMOVAL PROJECT

MEDIA INFORMATION KIT

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INTRODUCTION:

Corps of Engineers to Destroy Trees & Habitat along 200 miles of the Ouachita River in Louisiana

Because of an incident that occurred in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, the US Army Corp of Engineers currently have a project underway where they intend to destroy "all " trees within a 100 foot buffer zone along the entire Ouachita River levee system. We also understand that this is a nation-wide initiative and that all Corps of Engineers levee systems will be impacted. In fact, it is already occurring in some parts of the nation.

For our local area in Louisiana, this project will jeopardize the scenic beauty and wildlife habitat of the Ouachita River, and will leave the existing levee systems in danger of erosion that has not occurred since they were constructed.

Senators Landrieu and Vitter as well as Representative Alexander have all been working to reverse this project from happening, but we need the support of your organization to help in this fight.

Corps of Engineers to remove trees and risk compromising the safety of citizens along 200 miles of the Ouachita River in Louisiana

Because of an incident that occurred in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, the US Army Corp of Engineers currently have a project underway where they intend to destroy "all" trees and structures within a general 100 foot buffer zone along the entire Ouachita River levee system. We also understand that this is a nation-wide initiative and that all Corps of Engineers levee systems will be impacted. In fact, it is already occurring in some parts of the nation.

New Orleans should NOT be the model for our entire state or nation !

THIS PROJECT EXPOSES THE PUBLIC TO A MAJOR SAFETY RISK:

For nearly one-hundred years the current levee system has proven to be effective. DO NOT TAMPER with something that IS NOT broken.

RESOURCE: STUDY ON TREES & LEVEES FOLLOWING THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER FLOODS IN THE MIDWEST:

- http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/n_resource/flood/levee.htm
- <http://www.ncrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/ch/ch11/CHvolume11page217.pdf>

* This project will jeopardize the scenic beauty and wildlife habitat of the Ouachita River and rivers across the nation, and will also leave the existing levee systems in danger of erosion that has not occurred since the levees were constructed.

Senators Landrieu and Vitter as well as Representative Alexander have all been working to reverse this project from happening, but we need the support of your organization to help in this fight.

Below are the Comments of the President of the Ouachita River Foundation concerning the "Tree Cutting Proposal"

As President of the Ouachita River Foundation, I am seeking everyone's support in stopping what could be the future destruction of the beauty of many of America's scenic rivers, and especially the beautiful Ouachita river that runs through our state of Louisiana and Arkansas.

The following is a general synopsis of events that have transpired since hurricane Katrina that is now, because of new rules set by the Corps of Engineers could possibly mean the destruction of the Ouachita and many more scenic rivers in various states.

The U.S. Corps of Engineers is in the process of implementing the cutting of all trees on both sides of the levees along a 200 mile stretch of the Ouachita river in our area and also thousands of miles along the levees of many other scenic rivers in America. This plan which was legislated by the U.S. Congress will utterly destroy the beauty of these scenic rivers in many areas..

This plan is the result of a Congressional Committee and various studies made following hurricane Katrina, which recommended that trees not be allowed to grow "ON" a levee. The Corps decided in reaction to this, that they'd cut ALL trees that are within fifteen feet of the base of the levees, plus remove all of the stumps. A project of this magnitude would by necessity destroy more trees than those within fifteen feet of the levees. This would especially apply to the trees on the river side of the levees, because of right-of way access required for machinery, stump removal and grading, all of which would add to the destruction. It should also be noted that the Corps of Engineers are cutting the trees as far as 100 feet from the Lake Pontchartrain levee, so the distance from the levee that was supposed to be 15 feet has grown to 100 feet because there they call the base of the levee a "berm" that needs protecting.

There are 13,000 miles of levees under the jurisdiction of the Corps and all are inspected for safety each year. After, almost, 100 years, SUDDENLY, all of the "safe" levees no longer qualify for certification under this new tree rule. Congress's attempt to save our levees from storms like Katrina has resulted in mandating the destruction of the beauty of many of our nation's scenic rivers. In the case of the Ouachita where trees and levee follow close to the river, the appearance of the river would be reduced to that of a "drainage canal". This would also be typical for many other scenic rivers..

When asked if this plan could be reversed, the Corps of Engineers answer was, " if an extensive study was made PROVING that trees could exist adjacent the levees without harm to the levees", its possible.

Ironically, the perfect PROVEN study model already exists that would be typical for all rivers with tree growth and levees, This would be the Ouachita river, for trees have been growing adjacent the levees of the Ouachita for almost 100 years without any problems . . . but this model has been totally ignored by the Corps of Engineers...

An interesting aspect to the Congressional legislated destruction of the Ouachita and other scenic rivers is that while the Corps of Engineers are planning cutting the valuable tree growth that has existed for hundreds of years along 13,000 miles of rivers, they are at the same time receiving 100 million dollars from the U.S. Congress to restore the wetlands below New Orleans .

The wetlands are vital to the New Orleans area especially during a hurricane because they are a buffer to storm surges that would in turn produce flood waters. A past study has shown that the major reason for the deterioration of the wetlands was the Mississippi levee systems that were built by the Corps of Engineers following the flood of 1927. This levee system was constructed to hold water within the Mississippi river channel, but in doing the system prevents the wetlands from being refurbished with silt that is vital to rebuilding the wetlands each year. .

The question at this point is "why did the Corps of Engineers let trees grow along the levee system for the last 100 years if they posed a problem. The answer is that the trees have never posed a problem and what is actually taking place is an over reaction to a hurricane and resulting Congressional criticism of a levee system in New Orleans that was not high enough. This has absolutely nothing to do with trees and the Corps of Engineers knows it and Congress should know it. It is simply a matter of the levee not being high enough to protect new Orleans from a flood of the magnitude of that of Katrina.

The talk about trees is simply a diversion to keep the focus off the fact that the levee was not high enough, and everyone has agreed on this. If the real problem in New Orleans was that the levee was too low and they are having to raise it, using the same guide why are they not proposing to raise all 13,000 miles of levees along our rivers, instead of cutting trees that were not the problem in New Orleans and have never been a problem for the last 100 years along our rivers.

The talk about the danger of trees along levees has almost reached the point of paranoia as exemplified in a recent Corps of Engineer News Letter. "The Corps of Engineers is cutting almost 400 trees along lake Pantchartrain (the same trees that survived the Katrina winds) because they might blow over in a storm" Also, Less than 30 trees were blown over by Katrina in Jefferson Parish and none were associated with levee failure. .

Another detrimental aspect of the tree cutting project is digging out all the stumps which would require regrading and refilling large areas of ground that would be exposed for years before settling into a unified structure that could possibly withstand a flood without eroding.. In the mean time the levee system would be subject to the yearly high water that would surely wash out the fill areas and jeopardize the levee system..

If the Corps of Engineers were to cut all of the trees along our rivers as planned, and dig out all of the stumps, in the years to come Congress will have to fund another multi-million dollar program to plant new trees along the levees of our destroyed rivers to prevent erosion of the levee system just as the 100 million dollar program that they are now funding for the replacement of the wetlands that the Corps of Engineers destroyed.

Now we hear that Congress (who is funding the project) is blaming the Corp (who wrote the tree cutting rules) and the Corp is blaming Congress but neither has said they would change the tree cutting rule, for now they seem to be content with passing the blame while the project to destroy the Ouachita continues..

We appreciate your support in helping save the Ouachita, please contact your state and federal representatives and voice your opinion to stop the tree cutting project.

Glenn Gore, President
Ouachita River Foundation

HOW YOUR RESIDENTIAL AND BUSINESS INSURANCE RATES COULD BE RAISED PLUS CHANGES ON THE REGULATIONS OF ALL BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

The Corps of Engineers tree cutting proposal Could Raise Your Insurance Rates. The new regulation set forth in CEMVK-OD-M District Regulations Number 1130-2-530 of the Corps of Engineers Levee Owners Maintenance Manual has not only posed a serious problem in relation to the destruction of the scenic beauty of the Ouachita River, but could become an even more serious problem financially for everyone living along the Ouachita.

The levee system is subject to a certification inspection by the Corps of Engineers each year. Therefore, if the trees are not cut in accordance to the new Corps of Engineer's regulations the levee system cannot be certified as required. If the levees are not certified most of the areas along the Ouachita would then be declared a Flood Zone by FEMA who is the governing authority for such declarations.

The effect that a Flood Zone classification would have on both residential and business insurance premiums in the Ouachita valley would be an unbearable financial burden for all of the communities. Not only would every residence and business property owner be forced to pay astronomical insurance rates but every municipality would be forced to pay higher insurance rates which would be passed on to the public in the form of service and utility rate hikes. Also, to add to the insurance cost would be new requirements set forth by FEMA for building structures such as houses and commercial buildings in a designated Flood Zone. All foundations for new construction would be required to be raised above the flood level which could be several feet or much higher in some cases. This requirement to raise all building foundations above normal standards would increase the costs of both residential and commercial buildings dramatically or even prohibit buildings from being built in some cases..

In closing, It should also be noted that even if the Corps of Engineers were to say that they will not cut the trees, the issue would not be totally resolved. The Corps of Engineers must be required to remove the "tree cutting" regulation from their Levee Maintenance Manual, for without the removal of this regulation there is no assurance that, at some time in the future, this regulation would not be used to declare the Ouachita valley area a Flood Zone. Call your representatives and ask that they have this regulation deleted from the Corps of Engineer's Levee Manual.

Glenn Gore, President
Ouachita River Foundation

RECENT NEWS ARTICLES:

NBC-10 (KTVE) News Transcript Tree Cutting Along the Ouachita River

Friday, October 5th, 2007

That has everyone from politicians to environmentalists to property owners up in arms. The folks we met today feel the Corp's order to remove all trees from on and around levees around the country is a case of big government getting out of hand. Breton Youngblood is a little upset with the federal government.

Breton Youngblood told us, "They can say New Orleans flooded blah, blah, blah". He says the U.S. Army Corp of Engineer's plan to chop down trees along the Ouachita River Levee System- starting at his 214 year old family home- is a prime example of big government run amok.

Breton says, "You can't just stamp a bill in Washington DC and expect it to apply to everybody".

David Gore from the Ouachita River Foundation told us, "They are using what happened in Hurricane Katrina with a tree falling over on a levee down there to model the whole nation".

The Ouachita River Levee System covers two hundred miles like these along Breton Plantation and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers wants to cut down every single tree along every mile.

Breton Plantation in northern Caldwell Parish is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Breton Youngblood: "Well the home has been here since I guess the French Revolution period about the 1790's".

Now this home that's stood along the banks of the Ouachita River for over two hundred years finds itself at heart of the tree cutting controversy.

Breton Youngblood: "They said they were gonna make us an example".
If the tree cutting occurs it will affect much more than Breton Plantation.

David Gore: "Just imagine driving down Riverside Drive in Monroe or along Trenton Street in West Monroe and not seeing all the scenic beauty of the trees".
But more importantly opponents say the trees keep the levees stable.

David Gore: "It's putting the general public at a major safety risk".
Breton Youngblood: "It's gonna wash off into the river, just wash off into the river, the bank is held there by the trees".

Quite an alliance has been amassed in the fight to keep the trees along the Ouachita river standing.

To learn more about their efforts to stop the tree cutting log onto www.ouachitariver.org
Only time will tell if their combined efforts will defeat the Corp of Engineer's plans.

<http://www.nbc10news.net/news.php?id=4951>

Government closing in on levees' trees (September 14, 2007)

By Greg Hilburn - The News-Star

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The first target of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' new directive to clear trees from the Tensas Basin Levee District system is the 214-year-old Breston Plantation in Riverton in Caldwell Parish.

"I think its one of the stupidest ideas some bureaucrat in Washington has ever come up with," said Hugh Youngblood, who lives in the plantation house that's listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

"I would rather have every tooth in my mouth pulled than see this property defaced," he said. "They're going to have a hard time if they think they're going to come do anything to destroy the integrity of this property."

The corps created its new manual, which governs all U.S. levees, in 2006 after Congress directed it to review the safety of the country's levee systems following the levee failure in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

New regulations now require the clearing of encroachments from 15 feet on either side of the toes of the levees, which would impact residential areas and cities throughout the Tensas District's 400-plus mile levee system.

Tensas Basin officials have resisted the new regulations and asked for exceptions because they don't believe the trees pose a safety threat, but so far corps officials have stuck to their directive.

"This Riverton levee and the Monroe levee wall are going to be the first areas targeted," said John Stringer, executive director of the Tensas Basin Levee District. "If the corps insists, we're going to have to begin clearing the levees or risk decertification."

Stringer and levee board president Harris Brown flew to Washington this week for the second time to ask for relief, but Stringer said he won't be sure how strict the corps will be until it conducts an annual levee inspection during the first week of October.

"Hopefully by then there will be some consensus on what has to be removed, but the corps has already told us that these would be the first areas targeted," Stringer said.

But Stringer said that the levee district will likely hire a contractor to remove the trees from the levee surrounding Breston Plantation within two weeks.

"We've never disturbed those trees because of the historical significance of the place," Stringer said. "It's pretty clear that many of the trees were put there as soon as the levee was built in the 1930s."

Youngblood said he believes the house is the oldest on the Ouachita River.

“This is just one example of the effect it will have on the beauty of this region,” Youngblood said. “Just wait until they start taking down the trees (on South Grand and Riverside Drive) in Monroe.”

U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander, R-Quitman, and U.S. Sens. Mary Landrieu, D-La., and David Vitter, D-La., have all said they would lobby the corps against removing all the trees in the levee system.

“We’re meeting with them again one more time (in Washington), and well as with the top corps officers,” Stringer said. “Hopefully, we’ll see some results, but I don’t think we’ll know anything concrete until the inspection.”

Article published Apr 21, 2007 Uprooting for levee's sake

By Greg Hilburn ghilburn@thenewsstar.com

Those giant oaks that have provided a cool, green canopy along Monroe's Riverside Drive for decades could be yanked out by their roots this summer under new Army Corps of Engineers' regulations.

The same fate awaits the shady sycamores and majestic magnolias that line the backyards of homeowners and streets of cities and towns along more than 400 miles of the Tensas Basin levees.

No tree or flowering shrub is safe under new corps rules that require levees to be free and clear of such encroachments from 15 feet on either side of the toes of the levees.

"We've got one of the prettiest rivers in the world," West Monroe Mayor Dave Norris said. "Why would we want to slaughter all of those old trees that may have been standing for a century? I'm totally opposed to it until somebody proves it improves our protection from flooding."

The corps created its new manual, which governs all U.S. levees, in 2006 after Congress directed it to review the safety of the country's levee systems following the levee failure in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. One of the new regulations requires the removal of trees and shrubs within 15 feet of the toes of the levees.

"The key is that we don't want anything to penetrate the levee that would impact its stability," said Jim Spencer, the chief of flood control for the corps' Vicksburg, Miss., district.

But not everyone, including Spencer himself, believes that the trees pose a threat to any of the levees in the Vicksburg District. "We don't believe there is a life safety issue in the district," Spencer said. "We don't think there is a danger with the trees. All of our levee systems passed inspection in 2006. We believe they're in very good shape." The Tensas levee system, which is maintained by the Tensas Basin Levee District, has earned 47 straight outstanding maintenance awards from the corps.

John Stringer, executive director of the district, and his board's directors have pleaded with the top corps officials to change the new policy. Stringer and Tensas commissioner Harris Brown traveled to Washington, D.C., earlier this month to make their case to Maj. Gen. Don Riley, the corps' national civil works director. "(Riley) said that the corps was taking another look at it," Stringer said. "We're hoping he'll ask the Vicksburg engineers to come in and make their own determination about whether the trees pose a threat to the levee."

But unless the Corps revises its manual, the Tensas Basin Levee District will be required to remove the trees this year or risk being decertified and lose its qualifications for emergency funding. "What's troubling is that they've given us one year to remove these

trees at our expense," Stringer said. "If it's a verifiable safety issue we don't have an argument, but we don't believe that the trees pose a safety threat." Stringer estimates that such a project would cost about \$20,000 per mile, "and we've probably got 200 miles that would be impacted," he said.

Monroe Mayor Jamie Mayo said he will join the fight to preserve the trees and shrubs. "This regulation shouldn't apply across the board," Mayo said. "We don't have the same issues here that they have in New Orleans. We don't have hurricanes."

Stringer said the project would impact more than just the trees. "You can't just cut the trees; you have to remove the root systems," he said. "Those root systems are intertwined with utilities, swimming pools and plumbing. When you start snatching them out you're going to have a lot of problems."

"It's not practical," Brown said. "This would be a massive undertaking. We're hoping a wave of common sense washes over the corps." So are the people who live along the levees. "Someone has to stand up and say, 'This is crazy,'" said Todd Harris, whose house, trees and even a couple of horses touch the toe of the levee on Country Club Road in Monroe. "There's no way on earth that they can enforce that regulation. People live here. It would be devastating." Harris said he will begin by calling his congressman, who said this week that he will push for revisions even though the corps contends it was Congress that wanted beefed up levee protection.

"This is going to put everybody in a bind," said 5th District U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander, R-Quitman. "My opinion is that the corps is reacting to someone in New Orleans who said a falling tree could have started the whole levee failure. "They're going to have a hard time pointing their finger at Congress. The corps is using the whole thing as an excuse to wash its hands of the levee systems that have been under their control since the 1930s. We're going to try to head it off before it gets too far along."

Nell Seegers, president of the Monroe Garden Study League, said tree and shrub removal along the levee would scar the community's aesthetic image, which is already suffering from a recent economic development study. The Competitive Strategies Group study said that Monroe "does not show well as a community. It is not aesthetically pleasing to the eye." "As we've seen lately we're not the most attractive community and this would make the situation worse," said Seegers, whose club is an affiliate of the Garden Club of America. "This would certainly be a detriment to our city and all of those along the levee. "I would hope that the (corps) would fine-tune this policy to zero in on real problems and not just make blanket regulations that don't make sense."

That's a possibility, Spencer said. "The policy is currently under review and we're expecting guidance in the coming months that could clarify the situation," Spencer said. But until that happens, Spencer said the corps and the Texas Basin Levee District must prepare to remove the trees. "The rule hasn't changed," he said. "We don't have a waiver, and unless we get one we're proceeding forward."

Government closing in on levees' trees

By Greg Hilburn - The News Star

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New regulations now require the clearing of encroachments from 15 feet on either side of the toes of the levees, which would impact residential areas and cities throughout the Tensas District's 400-plus mile levee system.

Tensas Basin officials have resisted the new regulations and asked for exceptions because they don't believe the trees pose a safety threat, but so far corps officials have stuck to their directive.

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“We’re meeting with them again one more time (in Washington), and well as with the top corps officers,” Stringer said. “Hopefully, we’ll see some results, but I don’t think we’ll know anything concrete until the inspection.”

Seek aid to halt Corps tree-cutting

The new regulation set forth by the U.S. Corps of Engineers to cut all trees for 200 miles along both sides of the Ouachita River levees presents another serious problem, even if the tree-cutting project is stopped.

The reason: The levee system is subject to a certification inspection by the Corps of Engineers each year. Therefore, if the trees are not cut in accordance with the new regulations, the levee system cannot be certified. If the levees are not certified, most areas along the Ouachita would be declared a Flood Zone by FEMA.

A Flood Zone classification would raise both residential and business insurance premiums in the Ouachita valley. Every residence and business owner and municipality would see astronomical insurance rate increases, which would also increase public service rates. FEMA would also require all new residential and commercial buildings to be built to new standards. Foundations would be required to be several feet or more above grade to clear the flood plain level, increasing construction costs or possibly even prohibiting construction in many instances.

We should not be put in the position of having to give up the scenic beauty of the Ouachita to preserve our present insurance rates. The Corps must be required to rescind and remove this "tree-cutting" regulation from their Levee Maintenance Manual.

As president of the Ouachita River Foundation, I ask you to call your state and federal representatives. To learn more about the "tree-cutting-and-insurance" issues go to www.ouachitariver.org and click on "news and links."

Glenn Gore

New commander of Corps cruises Ouachita

By Greg Hilburn

ghilburn@thenewsstar.com

Col. Mike Wehr said Monday that the Army Corps of Engineers' directive to remove trees from the levees is still evolving.

Wehr got his first look at the Ouachita River on Monday as the new commander of the Corps' Vicksburg (Miss.) district during a two-hour excursion on the vessel Fred Lee, the corps' inspection barge.

The Corps, the Ouachita River Valley Association and the West Monroe-West Ouachita Chamber of Commerce coordinate the annual public awareness cruise from Lazarre Point in West Monroe.

A new directive that was crafted following Hurricane Katrina requires the clearing of trees and other encroachments up to 15 feet on either side of a levee.

Tensas Basin Levee District officials, as well as other levee boards throughout the country, have resisted clearing trees because of a backlash of criticism from property owners and municipal officials.

"This is a gradual process," said Wehr, 44, who takes over Vicksburg District from Col. Anthony Vesay. Corps commanders serve three-year tours.

"The decision was made for the protection of people," he said. "There's no doubt that if a large tree falls and removes a massive root ball, it can damage the levee. But how to implement this takes a lot of analysis and hard work. We're in the process of inspecting levee systems, and there are a few more decisions to be made."

John Stringer, director of the Tensas Basin Levee District, said the district won't take down any trees until after the corps' annual inspection Oct. 16-18.

"We're hoping to get some more guidance before we begin this process," Stringer said.

Stringer and other Tensas officials have lobbied the corps and Congress for relief from the directive because they don't believe most of the trees along levees in the system pose a danger.

Wehr, a California native, comes to Vicksburg from Fort Bragg, N.C., where he served in the 82nd Airborne Division.

"Venues like this help us align our requirements with the needs of communities along these navigation projects," Wehr said.

Paul Revis, executive director of the Ouachita River Valley Association, said the annual excursion allows the ORVA to highlight the importance of the Ouachita River and maintaining the infrastructure that keeps it navigable.

"There's a real fight going on in Washington," Revis said. "There are those who don't think this river deserves funding, but those people are wrong. Rivers like these contribute mightily to the national economy."

Media Coverage Outside of North Louisiana

Corps begins to clear hundreds of trees near levees

By Sheila Grissett
East Jefferson bureau

The roar of chainsaws early Tuesday signaled the beginning of the end for trees on the East Jefferson lakefront with the kick off of a sweeping new federal initiative to remove hundreds of trees in Jefferson and Orleans parishes – including some planted under a federal beautification contract and others with levee district approval.

Army Corps of Engineers officials say the targeted trees pose a potential threat to the stability of the levee system and must be removed to help protect against a replay of Hurricane Katrina's catastrophic flooding.

Large trees were uprooted at the site of at least two floodwall breaches during Katrina, and forensic investigators believe the upheaval of those root systems may have contributed to the failures.

Almost 370 trees, many hackberries, will be cut down in East Jefferson under two contracts issued Friday, before work shifts next to the Orleans lakefront, where a tentative plan starts with the removal of about 25 trees – most of them live oaks and pines – on the south side of Lakeshore Drive.

Longtime beautification activist Beulah Oswald, the founding president of Jefferson Beautification Inc., said Tuesday that she is confused by the corps' decision to cut some of the very trees that it planted over the years, as well as others planted by volunteers with East Jefferson Levee District approval.

About 130 trees on the protected side of the West Return Canal floodwall in Kenner were planted as part of a corps beautification project in the early 1990s. And on the lakefront, numerous trees were planted by individuals eager to create more shade and oases of green – all of which required the Levee District's blessings, Oswald said.

"I don't understand. What is it that they know now that they didn't know for all these years?" she said.

The answer to that question is both simple and profound, corps spokesman John Hall said.

"Katrina is the answer. Lesson learned is the answer. We've got to be a lot more careful than ever before," he said.

"With 20-20 hindsight, we'd have been better off not doing that, but there's no reason not to go ahead now and do what we need to do," Hall said.

Although corps officials have wrestled internally with details of the tree-cutting effort for weeks, the agency didn't announce its plan until Friday evening, and the cutting began early Tuesday.

Only five trees located within 15 feet of the West Return Canal floodwall at Kenner's border with St. Charles Parish, as well as three on the west side of 17th Street Canal, are scheduled for removal during this early phase of work.

The other 360 trees will come down on the East Jefferson lakefront, where no tree between the water's edge and the levee crown will be spared – including those planted to shade small parks created and tended over the years by volunteers who live near the levee.

But even as the cutting began Tuesday, there was confusion over exactly what was being done and whether it was necessary to completely denude the lakefront.

"I use the Linear Park (bike path) a lot, and I don't like it. I wish it didn't have to be done, and I don't know that all of the trees need to be removed," said East Jefferson Levee District President Alan Alario. "But I'm not an engineer, and the corps wants it done. They've fast-tracked it. It's out of my hands."

New Levee District commissioner Debbie Settoon, an engineer, said she understood that the corps was only removing trees on the landside of the bike path – and that's a plan she whole-heartedly endorses for levee safety.

"I don't know that it's necessary to take out trees on the water side of the path, if that's what is being done," she said.

And that is what's being done.

Corps officials say that the 130 or so feet of land between the water's edge and the levee itself is a wave berm that protects the earthen levee by slowing incoming surge and lessening its impact on the levee itself.

In other words, the levee protects Kenner and Metairie, while the wave berm protects the levee. If trees on the berm were toppled during a storm, it would expose a hole that would be further eroded by wave action.

"Any tree on the berm is considered a tree on the levee, and it cannot be allowed," Hall said.

A second corps contractor will begin cutting trees east of Causeway today, he said.

Workers are cutting the trees down to a height of about 4 ½ feet to reduce the likelihood of being toppled during a storm. But in an abundance of caution, the roots won't be dug up until after this storm season. The holes will be filled by the June 1 start of next hurricane season.

During a future phase of work, corps officials will tackle removing trees on private property – including those trees growing into the levees along the London Avenue, Orleans Avenue and 17th Street Canal.

(Sheila Grissett may be reached at sgrissett@timespicayune.com or (504) 883-7058.)

Trees Add To Levee Strength, But May Be Removed

<http://www.planetizen.com/node/26640>

30 August 2007 - 7:00am

Despite scientific findings that trees along levees help improve their effectiveness, federal regulations may require that trees lining levees in Central California be removed.

"Though federal officials on Tuesday faced a deluge of evidence that trees do not threaten levees, they continued to tout their own policy that could require every mature tree to be cut down on Sacramento levees."

"32 Central Valley levee districts in February failed a maintenance inspection by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Most failed because their levees had too many trees and shrubs."

"The corps, which is preparing a new national levee maintenance policy, currently says no vegetation larger than 2 inches in diameter should grow on a levee. But that standard has not been applied in California. In fact, the local district of the corps has worked for decades with local, state and federal agencies to plant more trees on levees."

"The issue affects levee managers nationwide, but it is especially critical in California, where levees provide virtually the only remaining riverside wildlife habitat."

Source: The Sacramento Bee, Aug 29, 2007

Trees on Levees Can Stay

SACRAMENTO (AP) -- California's tree-lined levees were considered a hazard this year by federal flood officials. But an agreement announced Friday by state and federal flood officials means they no longer have to be cleared of vegetation. At issue are trees and shrubs on about 1,600 miles of Central Valley levees that the U.S. Corps of Engineers had said in April should be cut down because tree roots can sometimes destabilize levees. Now local, state and federal agencies have agreed to craft a separate standard for inspecting California levees as it relates to trees and shrubs.

Pact gives a reprieve to Valley's levee trees

By Matt Weiser - Bee Staff Writer

Published 12:00 am PDT Saturday, September 22, 2007

Levee managers in the Central Valley are being told to holster their chain saws following a deal announced Friday to stay the execution of thousands of trees on area riverbanks.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has agreed not to enforce the vegetation component of its levee maintenance rules while a new policy is developed. The decision grants a reprieve to riverbank trees and their supporters throughout the Central Valley.

"What a sad place this would be without those trees," said Sacramento Mayor Heather Fargo, who chairs the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency. "I am pleased that by really looking at the science and listening to experts we are on the way to policies much more appropriate to Sacramento. We're back on the right track now."

For decades, the Army Corps allowed trees and large shrubs on Central Valley levees -- and even encouraged planting more. They did so in cooperation with wildlife agencies because there is almost no other riverbank habitat left.

Then, after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, the corps took a more rigid stance and enforced its national vegetation policy in California for the first time. That policy allows no plants larger than 2 inches in diameter on levees.

As a result, 32 Central Valley levee districts learned in January that they had failed a maintenance inspection, largely because of excessive vegetation. Many more, including urban Sacramento levees, were likely to fail another round of inspections this fall. The potential consequences of a failed inspection include losing access to federal levee rebuilding funds after a flood, and decertification by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Many local levee districts objected because of the expense required to clear vegetation. In many cases, levees would have to be rebuilt after removing tree roots. Residents feared loss of shade, scenery and habitat.

In hopes of settling the dispute, the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency held a symposium on levee vegetation last month. Experts presented evidence that trees may actually strengthen levees by binding soil layers together. There was little evidence that trees contribute to levee failure.

"It's the Fish and Wildlife Service position that, in many cases, vegetation is neutral or beneficial to levee integrity," Paul Henson, the federal agency's assistant regional director, said Friday.

The Bee first reported Sept. 1 that the Army Corps had dropped a March 30, 2008, compliance deadline for levee districts already warned about vegetation. In the new agreement, the corps goes further, promising to use "best available science" in concert

with other agencies to craft a policy that meets local needs. Until that policy is finalized, levee districts will not be punished for excessive vegetation in upcoming inspections.

The March deadline, however, remains in place for other maintenance problems, such as levee erosion or encroachment by structures. And the new policy will probably still require some trees to be removed if they clearly threaten levee stability.

"Without compromising public safety, our intent is to develop solutions that take into account the concerns of science and natural resources," said Col. Tom Chapman, Sacramento district commander at the Army Corps.

Friday's agreement arose from a meeting organized by the California Reclamation Board. It was endorsed by the board, SAFCA, Army Corps, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, local levee districts, and the state Water Resources and Fish and Game departments.

<http://www.safca.org/news/index.asp?id=116>

Legislators craft flood policy pact Future development in risk zones is tied to protection efforts.

By Jim Sanders - Bee Capitol Bureau

Published 12:00 am PDT Thursday, September 6, 2007

Ending more than a year of impasse, a compromise has been reached on wide-ranging legislation touted as a way to reduce flood risk and save lives in California's Central Valley.

The pact attempts to restrict development on flood-prone acreage without imposing building moratoriums or creating significant barriers to community economic growth.

"We can't go back to what we've had before, which is local government sometimes making decisions without taking any kind of flooding concerns into account," said Assemblywoman Lois Wolk, D-Davis.

Emerging in the final two weeks of the legislative session, the compromise creates an unlikely partnership of two lawmakers who have clashed often on flood measures for much of the past year -- Wolk and Sen. Mike Machado, D-Linden.

The deal worked out between the two legislators, and among numerous interest groups, is expected to be voted upon by early next week. It involves a package of flood-related bills.

The linchpin, Senate Bill 5, would prohibit new development -- but not until 2015 -- in hazardous Sacramento-San Joaquin Valley flood zones that lack adequate protection.

Meanwhile, the bill calls for the state Department of Water Resources expeditiously to provide Central Valley cities and counties with maps showing where flooding could occur from 100-year and 200-year storms, meaning they are so severe that their chances of occurring in any given year are 1 percent and 0.5 percent, respectively.

Though SB 5 imposes no immediate restrictions on new growth in hazardous areas, supporters claim that the new maps will have a sobering effect on land-use decisions, prompting cities and counties to reject dangerous development rather than risk lawsuits or fatalities.

"If they know there's a possibility that there's going to be a flood risk, they have to take that into consideration in their general plan and their zoning," Machado said.

The short-term effect of SB 5, essentially, would be to restrict development over the next eight years on acreage lacking 100-year flood protection -- and, after 2015, on properties not targeted for 200-year flood protection, Machado said.

"I'd love to go even further," Wolk said. "But this is good policy, it's a good balance, and it moves the flood-protection discussion forward."

Assemblyman Dave Jones, D-Sacramento, said he does not feel the bill is tough enough over the next eight years.

"My concern is we could put a lot of new homes and businesses in harm's way during that period, without doing the kind of risk management that we ought to be doing," he said.

Sen. Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, said SB 5 "is not perfect, but I certainly think it's worthy of strong support."

"The bill is a push to all the stakeholders -- local government, builders, the state of California -- to ensure public safety. That's the key word," Steinberg said.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has not announced which flood bills, if any, he will sign.

The newly amended SB 5 is endorsed or has conceptual support from the Planning and Conservation League, the League of California Cities, and the California Building Industry Association, among others. No formal opposition has emerged.

Two Sacramento-area GOP legislators, Sen. Dave Cox and Assemblyman Roger Niello, both of Fair Oaks, said Wednesday that they had not seen the bill.

Key elements of SB 5 include:

- The state would be required to create and adopt a Central Valley Flood Protection Plan by 2012. The plan must be incorporated into local government general plans and zoning ordinances within three years.
- By 2015, new development in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Valley could not be approved for flood-prone lands inhabited by 10,000 people -- or targeted for that many people -- unless the acreage has 200-year flood protection or is making adequate progress toward that standard.
- The California Department of Water Resources would be required to propose building standards for deep floodplains by 2009.
- Cities and counties would be authorized to prepare local flood plans that include a strategy for achieving 200-year protection, an emergency response plan, and a long-term funding strategy for improvements.

SB 5 would take effect only if another bill, Senate Bill 17, is signed into law.

SB 17 would rename the state Reclamation Board, which would become the Central Valley Flood Protection Board. The panel would expand from seven to nine members, with one of the two newcomers appointed by Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata and the other by Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez.

Wolk and Machado also support related legislation to require cities and counties to pay greater attention to flood-control planning; to require a flood-safety plan as a condition of

state funding for levee upgrades; to require the state to notify landowners whose property is in a hazardous flood zone; and to require cities and counties to share liability with the state, under certain conditions, if they allow growth in an undeveloped area prone to flooding.

<http://www.safca.org/news/index.asp?id=115>

Supporting Documents & Online Resources:

Corps Explains the Process of Tree Removal

<http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/hps/Status%20Report%20Newsletters/September28.pdf>

Trees & Fences (other structures) to Be Removed (Page 5)

<http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/hps/Status%20Report%20Newsletters/March%2029,%202007.pdf>

Louisiana and the Netherlands: A Friendship Forged by Water

From January 9 through 13, 2006, U.S. Senator Mary L. Landrieu, D-La., will lead a delegation of more than 40 Louisiana leaders and experts to the Netherlands as part of an educational exchange to discuss the many shared storm and flood protection challenges Louisiana and the Netherlands face. The delegation includes Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, D-La., Senator David Vitter, R-La., Rep. William Jefferson, D-New Orleans, and other local officials, engineers, scholars.

<http://landrieu.senate.gov/hurricanes/dutchtrip.cfm>

SPECIAL REPORT:

Levee Armoring: Woody Biotechnical Considerations for Strengthening Midwest Levee Systems

http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/n_resource/flood/levee.htm

<http://www.ncrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/ch/ch11/CHvolume11page217.pdf>

Scientists: Trees help, not hinder, levee safety - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers hears challenges to its removal policy at Sacramento hearing.

<http://www.sacbee.com/101/story/349565.html>

<http://eggheadblog.ucdavis.edu/?p=661>

<http://www.oregonlive.com/metro/oregonian/index.ssf?/base/news/119059710722760.xml&coll=7>

Special Supporting Groups / Researcher Quotes:

<http://www.sacbee.com/101/story/349565.html>

Much of the corps' policy is based on a Federal Emergency Management Agency document called "FEMA 534 Technical Manual for Dam Owners," (115 page document from September 2005 following Hurricane Katrina) which explains threats to earthen dams from trees and other vegetation.

Link to document:

www.fema.gov/library/viewRecord.do?id=1451

Douglas Shields, a hydraulic engineer at a U.S. Department of Agriculture lab in Mississippi, has studied levees on the Sacramento River and elsewhere. He said tree roots improve the shear strength -- the point at which soil yields under stress -- of the soil they grow in.

"By and large ... trees have a positive or beneficial influence on the safety of levees," Donald Gray, a geotechnical engineering professor at the University of Michigan, told the symposium.

"You see a major increase in factor of safety as we move from a minimal root area ratio to a higher level," he said. "We concluded that maintenance standards should favor shrubs and woody trees."

This year, he and several colleagues used a computer model to show that trees also offer more erosion protection than a uniform carpet of grass, the levee cover favored by the corps.

More than 500 people from as far away as Holland are attending the symposium, organized by the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency and the Corps of Engineers. It continues today at the Sacramento Convention Center on J Street. Some asked what the consequences would be to flood safety if trees were clearcut from levees, leaving their roots behind.

UC Davis horticulture professor Alison Berry said this could destabilize levees by causing a large and disparate root mass to decay in unison. Levee erosion also might increase.

Dirk Van Vuren, a UC Davis professor of wildlife biology, said removing trees could create better conditions for animals that are most troublesome for levee managers: burrowing rodents.

Gophers, ground squirrels and voles are the most prolific burrowing mammals on area levees, Van Vuren said. But they actually prefer open landscapes to easily detect predators. So a tree-clearing program on levees, he said, is likely to improve their habitat and cause their numbers to grow.

CALIFORNIA CORPS OF ENGINEERS:

The corps' regional commander, Brig. Gen. John McMahon, said Friday that removing trees won't necessarily make levees safer, because rotting roots left behind could provide a path for seepage that could compromise the levee.

"There's no doubt in my mind our headquarters would like one standard applied broadly across the full spectrum of levees," said McMahon. "I personally don't think that's the right tack to take in this situation. Not all vegetation on levees is bad."

Jeremy Arrich, chief of Water Resources' flood project integrity and inspection branch, said the goal is to persuade the Corps of Engineers to consider natural resources in its maintenance policies. Without that consideration, he said, many of Sacramento's urban levees are likely to fail the national policy when next evaluated by the corps.

THE NEW ORLEANS CONNECTION ?

December 1, 2005 -

http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/01/national/nationalspecial/01levees.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print&oref=slogin

Louisiana's Levee Inquiry Faults Army Corps

By **JOHN SCHWARTZ** and **CHRISTOPHER DREW**

The devastation of New Orleans was a disaster waiting to happen because of a significant flaw in levee design by the Army Corps of Engineers, according to preliminary findings from the official Louisiana team investigating the Hurricane Katrina flooding.

The findings are included in a draft report prepared by engineers on the team. They mirror the conclusion of many outside experts: that the levee that toppled at the 17th Street Canal was built with too little regard for the inherent weakness of the soil under the canal banks. Similar conditions, the experts say, existed at the sites of the two other major levee breaches in metropolitan New Orleans.

"It should have been obvious," said the deputy director of the Louisiana State University Hurricane Center, Ivor van Heerden, the leader of the investigative group, known as Team Louisiana.

Billy R. Prochaska, an engineering consultant to the team, said, "That's our question: how could this be?"

The puzzlement is especially acute, Mr. Prochaska said, because the levee design "was gone over by everyone" up and down the Corps of Engineers organization, from the local level to Washington, before the levees were upgraded with flood walls in the 1980's and 90's.

The Louisiana team's investigation of the levee breaches shows that the sheet piles, the interlocking sheets of steel that are driven into soil to anchor the levees and prevent a flow of water underneath them, were too shallow to prevent that flow. Tests by the Louisiana group found that sheet piles reached only 10 feet below sea level in some spots, far less than would protect the city. Corps documents dating from the time of construction show that the design was for a depth of 17½ feet, but even that, the investigators say, would have been too shallow. By comparison, in spots where the levees are now being repaired, the Corps of Engineers is calling for sheet piles to be driven to a depth of 51 to 65 feet.

The state manager for the Team Louisiana project, Edmond J. Preau Jr., assistant secretary of the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, said the levees had failed at water levels that would have been predicted had the soil problem

been recognized. The walls should never have been toppled by water levels of 11 or 12 feet, Mr. Preau said.

"You had a wall that was supposed to protect to water levels up to 14, 14½ feet," he said. "Water didn't get that high. The wall fell down. We want to know why."

A spokesman for the corps acknowledged yesterday that its own sonar tests had confirmed the state's findings of 10-foot sheet pile depths, and said piles would be pulled from the ground at the 17th Street Canal within the next 10 days to measure them directly. But the spokesman, James Taylor, noted that pile depth was only one factor contributing to the strength of a levee, along with others like the levee's height and width.

Another corps spokesman, Wayne Stroupe, said it was still too early to know exactly why the levees of New Orleans failed. The corps, Mr. Stroupe said, is conducting its own investigation, with a report expected at the beginning of June. He said the report would include detailed analyses of the forces that the storm actually brought to bear on the city's flood control systems.

Engineers typically build structures with somewhat greater strength than is necessary for expected challenges. A design standard set by the Corps of Engineers calls for levees to be built at 130 percent of the strength needed to withstand a Category 3 hurricane, and design documents from the corps stated that the New Orleans levees would meet the standard.

But the preliminary calculations by Team Louisiana suggest that the 17th Street Canal levee was actually built at 93 percent to 98 percent of that strength near the breached area - substantially weaker than the forces of a Category 3 storm.

Mr. Preau, the state manager of the team, declined to comment in detail about its draft, which was described yesterday in *The Times-Picayune* of New Orleans and the *Baton Rouge* daily, *The Advocate*. The draft itself was not officially released because data are still being collected and analyzed, he said.

"We don't want to release any of this until we have all of our background data completely documented," he said. But he also said that the final determinations, which will be released early next year, were likely to be similar to those in the draft.

Another member of Team Louisiana, G. Paul Kemp, an associate professor at L.S.U. and director of the Natural Systems Modeling Group at the university's Center for Coastal, Energy and Environmental Resources, said outsiders might interpret the findings as an effort to foist blame for Louisiana's problems onto the federal government and avoid responsibility for local lapses in levee maintenance.

But, Dr. Kemp argued, "the design and construction is a process that is overseen by federal people at every step." He added that the ultimate goal was to find out precisely what went wrong, for the sake of future guidance.

HOW TO HELP

We urge you to contact all of your State and Federal Representatives and ask them to stop this project. To envision what this project would do to the Ouachita, look at all of the scenic beauty on this website then envision the banks without trees.

Contact:

- **Senator David Vitter**

1217 North 19th Street Monroe, La. 71202
318-325-8120

- **Congressman Rodney Alexander**

1900 Stubbs Avenue Monroe, Louisiana, 71202
318-322-3500

- **Senator Mary Landrieu**

724 Hart Senate Building United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
202-224-5824

* **When calling or writing Senator Landrieu refer to project number 108706**

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND UPDATES VISIT:

www.ouachitariver.org