

Commander 's Desk

The following is a Letter to the Editor in response to a July 14 Times-Picayune Editorial. It's my hope this helps to resolve some of the confusion regarding recent concerns on a West Bank and Vicinity Project

Dear Editor:

The editorial in the *Times-Picayune* on Saturday, July 14, "Keep an eye on levee," brought up several differences in understanding that I would like to address.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers builds its reputation one day at a time, one project at a time. Design and / or construction issues on any scale affect the reputation of the entire agency, not only the District that manages the project.

Public safety has always and will continue to be the Corps' top priority; to that end, we have quality control and assurance processes in place to ensure that contract specifications and quality standards are met. Quality, schedule and budget are equally important parts of ensuring the safety of the public. In cases where unsuitable material is found in a levee, like the reach West Bank & Vicinity 14c.2 (WBV 14c.2), the Corps intensifies the level of quality assurance.

The non-Federal sponsor for WBV 14c.2, the Coastal Protection & Restoration Authority, and the local levee authority, the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-West, expressed concerns last year about the woody material in the embankment and its potential affect on the structural integrity of this particular levee. In recognition of those concerns, a Tiger Team –independent of the New Orleans District and not under my command – was formed to evaluate the levee's performance and compliance with Hurricane & Storm Damage Risk Reduction System criteria. This Tiger Team was made up of engineers from outside the New Orleans District and representatives from the non-Federal sponsor and local levee authority.

One of the benchmarks of success for a Tiger Team leader is to ensure to the best of his or her ability that no member is given preference. All parties must have an equal voice and an equal opportunity to develop and inform the final report; all members' views were published in the final report and, in my opinion, the Tiger Team leader was successful in this regard.

Throughout the Tiger Team's exploration of WBV 14c.2, the New Orleans District, the non-Federal sponsor and the levee authority were fre-

quently briefed about the status of the investigation and the schedule for delivering a final report. The final report - in its entirety – was simultaneously released to me, the New Orleans District Commander; the Coastal Protection & Restoration Authority; and the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-West on Tuesday, July 10, 2012. The Tiger Team fulfilled its obligation to provide the report to the non-Federal sponsor two weeks in advance of a briefing of the report to the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-West Board, which is being scheduled for late July.

As the New Orleans District Commander, I made the decision to subsequently release the executive summary to media with outstanding queries on the subject Wednesday, July 11, 2012 and then to post the full report and its appendices to our public web site on Thursday, July 12, 2012. At no time did I commit to withholding the final report from the public or the media. The Corps has a duty to be transparent, and this report should be available to any and all who are interested in understanding the study. Lessons learned following Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav and Ike; the 2008 and 2011 Flood Fights; and the 2010 Deep Water Horizon oil spill have helped the Corps to develop a clear understanding of what needs to be done to cultivate trust; open and transparent communication.

The Tiger Team made recommendations within the report for the New Orleans District AND the non-Federal sponsor to consider and determine if any corrective actions are necessary and warranted. The New Orleans District is currently assessing the report and will soon brief the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-West about the path forward.

What I understand from the Tiger Team is that all parties agree that the levee will perform as designed; however, there were some Corps-wide issues and comments that required more time to adequately address. This ultimately resulted in the final report being delayed.

In light of the above facts, I want to bring to your attention a couple of inaccurate statements:

- But the corps refused to provide the 450-page report, along with thousands

of pages in supporting documents, to the West Bank levee authority before making it public.

The final report - in its entirety – was provided to the non-Federal sponsor and the local levee authority on July 10, 2012. The executive summary was provided on Wednesday, July 11 to media (two) with outstanding queries on the subject. The entire report and appendices were posted on the New Orleans District web site on July 12, 2012.

- The corps had previously agreed to give the levee board an advance look at its findings, and levee authority members are understandably frustrated that the agency went back on its word.

AND

- The corps shouldn't have reneged on the agreement, especially since the report has been delayed three times.

Neither the Corps nor the Tiger Team reneged on any agreements with anyone involved in the process. The Tiger Team agreed to provide the report to the New Orleans District, non-Federal sponsor and the local levee authority two weeks in advance of a briefing to the board. The Tiger Team met this commitment. The final report - in its entirety – was simultaneously released to me, the New Orleans District Commander; the Coastal Protection & Restoration Authority; and the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-West on Tuesday, July 10, 2012.

- Breaking a promise does little to foster trust in the agency, and the corps and the levee authority have been at odds over

the integrity of the levee for a long time. Woody debris, including huge logs, were unearthed in test trenches, but it took the levee authority months to get the corps to give the issue serious attention.

The Corps and the Tiger Team met its commitment. The very assembly of the Tiger Team in recognition of concerns from the non-Federal sponsor and local levee authority confirm the agency commitment to providing a comprehensive review of the project.

According to the Tiger Team report, Chapter 11, "...the Tiger Team concludes that the as built levee is in compliance with the specifications...the relative size and isolated nature of the non-woody debris encountered within fill material placed by the WBV 14c.2 contractor are such that there is no evidence to demonstrate contractual non-compliance with the WBV 14c.2 specifications."

Neither the Corps nor the Tiger Team broke any promises to anyone involved in the process.

I am pleased that the line of communication between the Corps and the *Times-Picayune* is open. My understanding from previous meetings with your editorial board is that there are policies and procedures in place for how staff should approach fact-checking. The Public Affairs Chief, Ken Holder, and his team are always available to assist in that regard or you are welcome to give me a call or send an e-mail anytime.

Very respectfully,

Edward R. Fleming
Colonel, US Army
Commander, New Orleans District
US Army Corps of Engineers



US Army Corps of Engineers
New Orleans District

Stakeholder Update
BUILDING STRONG®

August 2012

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Civil Works Program

USACE undergoing major transformation in the way it executes Corps' mission

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is undergoing a major transformation in the way we execute our Civil Works mission.

The changes come as the corps' Civil Works Program faces numerous challenges requiring an improved business model, while continuing its focus on water resource development including flood risk management, navigation, recreation, and infrastructure and environmental stewardship.

To meet current and future challenges, and address the water resources needs of our nation, we have initiated an effort to transform our Civil Works Program nationwide to improve performance and responsiveness.

We're looking to increase customer satisfaction, public trust and confidence. Simply put, the transformation provides a smarter way of supporting the nation and delivering the best possible products and services.

That means modernizing project planning, budget development, and project evaluating processes via a smart infrastructure strategy.

Our current approach to planning, budgeting, delivering and managing our nation's water resources infrastructure is unsustainable. So our new strategy includes improvements to policies and procedures providing for improved management of the Nation's

aging infrastructure. It sets three clear decision points for making investment decisions: new planning study starts, new construction starts, and recapitalizing or divesting.

The transformation will also promote enhanced capabilities and greater involvement, ownership, consensus and commitment among internal Corps team members,

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local sponsors and partners.

The changes are needed given current budget restraints though operations and maintenance costs continue to rise.

To offset those costs, part of the transformation focuses on an improved planning process ensuring studies are completed in less time while not jeopardizing the quality of engineering, environmental and economic analysis.

The 3x3x3 Rule

A major element of the effort is that feasibility studies will be completed at a cost no more than \$3 million, in three years or less and require continued involvement of three levels of USACE – districts, divisions, and headquarters.

Some sponsors and stakeholders have previously voiced their frustration over

the cost and time it takes to complete studies; this is the right move to answer those concerns.

And in bringing planning, budget development and execution into the 21st Century, we should be able to deliver comprehensive and lasting solutions faster; improve on our high standards of technical excellence; leverage fiscal resources; efficiently operate water resources infrastructure across a broad range of projects; and avoid needless redundancy and over-speculation – increasing organizational efficiency.

The reality is, many of our projects are more than 50 years old. There is a pressing national need to either recapitalize these assets to maintain their current and future viability, or to repurpose or divest them.

As our infrastructure ages and deteriorates, the funding to address critical maintenance and rehabilitation needs decreases. These factors place a severe strain on our ability to fully ensure the safety of the infrastructure, maintain it to meet performance goals and efficiently provide the comprehensive benefits for which projects were designed and constructed.

By transforming the Corps' approach to Civil Works, we greatly increase our effectiveness in addressing these challenges to our Nation's infrastructure.

Corps' Commanding General makes restoration of La. coast a top priority

During his first visit to the New Orleans District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Commanding General Lt. Gen. Thomas Bostick made the restoration of coastal Louisiana one his top priorities as he visited projects across the greater New Orleans area.

Upon arriving at the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal Surge Barrier, Lt. Gen. Bostick signed the "Louisiana Coastal Area (LCA) Barataria Basin Shoreline Restoration" Chief of Engineers Report. The signing of this Chief's Report approves the \$428 million coastal restora-

tion plan and allows the Corps of Engineers and its partners to move into the pre-construction engineering and design phase for this important project.

Lt. Gen. Bostick was joined by U.S. Senator David Vitter as he addressed the New Orleans media regarding the importance of coastal restoration and how it supports increased levels of risk reduction, economic development and natural resources.

The "LCA Barataria Basin Barrier Shoreline Restoration" project includes restoring the shorelines, dunes and coastal

marshes of Caminada Headland and Shell Island, which are critical features for the long-term sustainability of the structure and function of the Barataria Basin ecosystem.

This project is part of the larger LCA Program which focuses on a systematic approach to coastal restoration using critical near-term ecosystem restoration projects, such as the Barataria Basin Barrier Shoreline Restoration, and large-scale, long-term programs to restore natural features and ecosystem processes.



Photo by Paul Floro

Lt. Gen. Thomas Bostick, Commanding General, addresses members of the press June 22, at the Lake Borgne Surge Barrier. He stressed the importance of coastal restoration for increased levels of risk reduction, economic development and the preservation of natural resources, while New Orleans District Commander Col. Edward Fleming, left, and Louisiana Sen. David Vitter look on.

Belle Chasse Tunnel Risk Reduction update



The Hurricane and Storm Damage Risk Reduction System (HSDRRS) construction at the Belle Chasse Tunnel is restricting ground water from flowing naturally. The sheet pile placed below the new floodwalls is trapping ground water, causing it to seep through unsealed highway joints and onto the roadway. Heavy rains during the past few weeks have caused the amount of leaking water to increase. To address this seepage issue, the Army Corps of Engineers will install two relief wells with electric pumps at both the tunnel entrance and exit. Groundwater, collected by the relief wells, will be pumped to drainage basins where it will naturally flow into the drainage system.

The Corps will power the pumps from the existing electrical system within the tunnel and is currently working with the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LADOTD) to develop the electrical plan.

Public safety continues to be a top priority. To increase public awareness and safety, the contractor has provided “water on road” signs and posted a 35 mph speed limit sign. These signs will remain until construction of the relief wells and pumps are completed in late September 2012.



US Army Corps of Engineers
New Orleans District

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