



US Army Corps
of Engineers
Mississippi Valley Division



Corps Hurricane Response

Task Force Hope Status Report

March 6, 2009

Energy and Water Development Subcommittee

Chief of Engineers testifies before Congress

House Committee members given update on HSDRRS in greater New Orleans

By Susan Spaht

Lt. Gen. Robert L. Van Antwerp, Chief of Engineers, was invited to appear before the Committee on Appropriations, Energy and Water Development Subcommittee, on Feb. 24, Mardi Gras Day. The Chief was asked “to testify on the topic of Hurricane Katrina oversight” and “to address the Corps’ execution and management of the appropriations made to restore and enhance the Hurricane and Storm Damage Risk Reduction System (HSDRRS)” in the greater New Orleans area.

The Chief was accompanied to Capitol Hill by Maj. Gen. “Bo” Temple, Deputy Commanding General for Civil & Emergency Operations; Brig. Gen. Michael Walsh, Commander of the Mississippi Valley Division; and Karen Durham-Aguilera,



Lt. Gen. Robert Van Antwerp



Brig. Gen. Michael Walsh



Karen Durham-Aguilera, P.E. SES

Director of Task Force Hope. During his testimony, Chief Van Antwerp discussed ongoing reconstruction, restoration and improvement efforts on the HSDRRS.

The Chief opened his testimony with an overview of the HSDRRS. He listed the Corps’ addition of scour protection to levees, replacing I-walls

with stronger T-walls, making repairs to existing pump stations, storm proofing of pump stations, improving

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interior drainage, and restoring and completing components of the Lake Pontchartrain & Vicinity and West Bank & Vicinity projects.

He added that the ongoing work also includes incorporating Plaquemines Parish non-federal levees into the existing New Orleans to Venice project, and improving levees in Terrebonne Parish.

He noted that the Corps' goal to complete the HSDRRS in 2011 is more than one-third through construction, and that the System is already stronger and more resilient than any time in its history. He told the Committee members that the Corps has used extensive technical modeling, lessons learned and risk-informed processes to enhance its design criteria and on-the-ground construction; and the progress continues.

Inner Harbor Navigation Canal (IHNC) Surge Barrier- Lake Borgne

The Chief discussed a few of the System's largest projects in more detail, starting with the IHNC Surge Barrier – Lake Borgne. This construction project, awarded to Shaw Environmental of New Orleans, is already in construction. The first features of this project will provide risk reduction from flooding to a large portion of Orleans Parish and to parts of St. Bernard Parish by the peak of this year's hurricane season, and will



Photo courtesy of Shaw

provide 100-year level risk reduction in 2011 when it is completed.

The Chief told the Committee members that the Corps "has recently determined that there are project cost increases that result in a funding shortfall" for the IHNC Surge Barrier project. He attributed the impending shortfall, in part, to added features for navigational safety; a more robust barrier wall to meet new, more stringent design criteria; and materials and fuel escalation

costs that occurred nationwide in 2008.

To overcome this shortfall and still meet the schedule commitments, the Chief said the Corps is evaluating

possible courses of action, such as re-allocating funds. He assured the Congressmen that the additional IHNC funding can be met within the overall HSDRRS program allocation and does not require additional appropriations.



Modeling simulations at ERDC

Editor's Note:

The scope of work and design criteria for the IHNC Surge Barrier – Lake Borgne became better defined subsequent to development of the original cost estimate resulting in cost increases. Changes included design for higher storm surge conditions, the addition of features for navigation safety, and construction of containment dikes for dredged material to meet Louisiana Coastal Zone management standards. Additional increases resulted from the cost of fuel and construction materials escalations in 2008, as the Chief said in his testimony.

Other unexpected costs were incurred when the Corps conducted extensive modeling simulations at the Corps' Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC) to ensure that the 150-foot wide IHNC navigable gates did not need to be widened to 225 feet, as some had proposed.

Total costs for this project will include engineering and design, project and construction management, and real estate.

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The Corps is conducting rigorous analyses to determine the exact amount of the funding needed for the Surge Barrier at Lake Borgne.

There are several options for reallocating money from other System work, with prior notification to Congress. For instance, money can be reallocated from project work scheduled to be done at a later date. As the Corps finishes various portions of the System, it can replace the reallocated funds.

Permanent Protection for Outfall Canals (Permanent Pumps)

The Chief explained that the interim closure structures at the three outfall canals – 17th Street, London Avenue and Orleans Avenue – presently provide 100-year level of risk reduction. The sites under consideration for



17th Street Outfall Canal

Permanent Protection are being evaluated to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). “We remain committed to providing permanent risk reduction at the outfall canals in 2013,” the Chief said. “We anticipate that the New



Orleans Commander will sign the Individual Environmental Report (IER) document in April 2009, and we expect to execute an agreement for initiation of this work with the State of Louisiana soon thereafter.”

Gulf Intracoastal Waterway – West Closure Complex (GIWW-WCC)

Another major feature of the 100-year level system is the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway – West Closure Complex, part of the West Bank & Vicinity project, which will reduce risk for portions of Jefferson, Orleans and Plaquemines Parishes. The

Chief explained that implementation of this huge project will significantly reduce risk by removing over 25 miles of levees, floodwalls, gates and pumping stations along the Harvey and Algiers Canals from exposure to storm surge.

The West Closure Complex will include a 225-foot navigable surge barrier gate and a smaller secondary flood gate. It will also have a pumping station with a pumping capacity of 20,000 cfs, the largest in the world. When the gates are closed, during a tropical event, the pumps will remove storm water from 10 existing pump stations along the interior canals.

Southeast Louisiana Urban Flood Damage Reduction Project (SELA)

The Chief told the Committee that the Corps is continuing construction on nine SELA interior drainage projects worth about \$110 million. Four of those projects are substantially complete. Of the work authorized, approved and funded under the SELA program, 51 of 74 contracts have been awarded. While the SELA projects are not part of the HSDRRS or perimeter protection for the Greater New Orleans area, completion of SELA projects will improve the system’s ability to handle interior drainage.

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Ecosystem Restoration Efforts



"We are engaged on several fronts with respect to ecosystem restoration and various levels of storm risk reduction measures in coastal Louisiana," the Chief stated. "These activities are conducted under numerous authorities that provide for varying levels of construction, design and planning.

The Corps is continuing to coordinate all of these activities, including Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration, Louisiana Coastal Area Plan, and the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Ecosystem Restoration Study, to improve both hurricane damage risk reduction and ecosystem restoration in southeast Louisiana."

To learn more about the HSDRRS and projects in the System, go to:

www.mvn.usace.army.mil/hps2/

Corps Sponsoring Public Meeting in Braithwaite Wed., Mar. 11, 2009

The Corps will describe the recommended plan to improve the Bayou Dupre Control Structure in St. Bernard Parish as it will be discussed in IER 8, and provide an overview of the options to improve the Caernarvon Floodwall in St. Bernard Parish as it will be discussed in

Other Timely Questions Regarding the HSDRRS

Q: Are increases in project costs influencing decisions regarding project alternatives, or resulting in re-evaluation of project alternatives that will provide less effective protection?

A: No. The Corps has a rigorous, systematic process for evaluating project alternatives and choosing an alternative that will meet all required criteria and provide 100-year level of risk reduction.

Q: Is the Corps re-evaluating the use of floodgates on Causeway Boulevard in Metairie and Interstate 10 at Bayou Sauvage in Eastern New Orleans to cross levees, as opposed to raising Causeway Boulevard or building a bridge or ramp over I-10, in an effort to cut costs?

A: The Corps' first priority is public safety and reaching the 100-year level of risk reduction with the HSDRRS. While cost is a factor, it is not the only factor. Engineering solutions are evaluated considering multiple criteria, including technical sufficiency, risk, schedule, traffic impacts during and after construction, maintenance of evacuation routes, con-

structability, operation and maintenance, and cost.

Regarding the I-10 in Eastern New Orleans, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LaDOTD) recently agreed that a road lift will be all that is necessary there; that is, no bridge or floodgate will be required.

The Corps plans to proceed with raising Causeway Boulevard and is working closely with the State of Louisiana and the local Levee authorities on how to best implement this solution.

Q: There are concerns that first responders following a tropical event would not be able to access the area if floodgates are used over a major roadway. Is that a concern?

A: If floodgates are used on *any* major roadway that requires emergency access, a feature such as an emergency ramp over the hurricane structure will be incorporated into the project to facilitate access. The Corps' number-one priority is always public safety, and that includes the safety of public workers.



IER 9. Corps project managers will also discuss the recommended plan for the Chalmette Loop Levee portion of the hurricane system as it will be described in IER 10.

A video will describe construction at the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal Surge Barriers at Lake Borgne and Lake Pontchartrain. There will be a brief discussion of the status of identifying potential borrow (levee clay) (IERs 28 and 29).

Lynn Oaks School 1 Lynn Oaks Dr., Braithwaite, LA 70040



Open house begins at 6:00 p.m. Presentation and discussion begins at 7:00 p.m.

For questions or comments concerning Individual Environmental Reports or the Corps' environmental processes go to:

mvnenvironmental@usace.army.mil

Corps hosts Partnering Conference



Participating in the recent Partnering Conference are, from left, Col. Alvin Lee, Commander of the New Orleans District; Maj. Gen. "Bo" Temple, Deputy Commanding General for Civil & Emergency Operations; Karen Durham-Aguilera, Director of Task Force Hope; Billy Nungesser, President of Plaquemines Parish; Garret Graves, Chairman, Louisiana Coastal Protection & Restoration Authority. (USACE Photo by Ricky Boyett, photo illustration by Tom Durel)

"Teamwork and collaboration are keys to our success!"


By Susan Spaht

The Corps of Engineers hosted a Partnering Conference on February 17-18 in New Orleans. The purpose of the conference was to provide a venue and open environment for the Corps of Engineers and its many partners to communicate, share ideas, answer each other's questions and generally coordinate efforts for "working stronger together".

"Our goal for this conference was to provide an opportunity for Corps leaders and our Federal, State and local partners to interact and discuss the future direction of the joint challenges we face," said Tom Holden, Deputy District Engineer at the New Orleans District, who helped organ-

ize the event. "We think the result was highly successful."

More than 200 people attended the two-day conference. Government leaders in attendance represented the U.S. Congress; Corps Headquarters, Division and District; State government; and local governments. The Corps had leaders and branch chiefs representing such areas as operations and maintenance, regulatory, navigation, real estate, construction, legal, contracting, engineering, resource management, and project management.

"Communication and cooperation with our Federal, State and local partners are essential to our success at the Corps," said Karen Durham-Aguilera, Director of Task Force Hope. "This Partnering Conference was an ideal forum for fostering relationships and achieving results for Louisiana." 



"The resilience of this State has been amazing. We all applaud how citizens, cities and parishes, the State, and a variety of Federal agencies have pulled together to bring New Orleans and the surrounding parishes back. We have seen some great partnering and problem solving right here in Louisiana." - **Maj. Gen. "Bo" Temple, Deputy Commanding General for Civil & Emergency Operations**



"One thing that has changed since Hurricane Katrina is citizen involvement in government and government reform..." - **Hon. Steve Scalise, U.S. House of Representatives, 1st District of Louisiana**



"We all want the coast restored and healthy. We all want hurricane protection. We all want safe communities. Everybody plays a role; we can't be successful unless everyone is here." - **Garret Graves, Chairman, Coastal Protection & Restoration Authority**



"There will be a major shift towards execution and construction in 2009 and we will be working at an unprecedented pace. We are committed to communicating risk and project impacts to the community, and we need continued feedback and dialogue with all of you. Teamwork and collaboration are keys to our success!" - **Karen Durham-Aguilera, Director, Task Force Hope**

Letter to the Editor

To The Times-Picayune

From Karen Durham-Aguilera Sent on March 5, 2009

The Corps would like to correct inaccuracies in the article about the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal (IHNC) Surge Barrier project ("Corps project cost soars", February 26, 2009). It erroneously conveyed the impression the Corps is focused only on cutting costs. Public safety is our number one priority. We are focused on achieving the best engineering solutions to our area's flood risk reduction challenges. We consider many factors to arrive at the best solution, including technical sufficiency, risk, reliability, schedule, environmental impacts, constructability, and operation and maintenance, as well as cost.

The IHNC Surge Barrier project was awarded as a design-build cost-plus contract. This type of contract allows engineering and design, real estate acquisition, portions of construction, and other project requirements to occur simultaneously. As the public agency charged to deliver this program, we are responsible to determine every part of every project. We are determining whether any additional funds are needed in any areas. When necessary, we have authority to reallocate money from other system work after prior notification to Congress. As work on the system progresses, we can replace funds that were moved.

Several changes made after construction contract award led to the potential need for additional IHNC Surge Barrier funds. We added navi-

gation safety features to the 150-foot-wide gate across the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway. Extensive modeling simulations at the Corps' Engineer Research and Development Center assured additional features would provide public, environmental and navigational safety within the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway.

Comments about the Causeway and the Interstate 10 Bridge in eastern New Orleans are also incorrect. The State Department of Transportation and Development and the Corps agreed that a road lift will be all that is necessary for the I-10 as it crosses the levee. No bridge and no floodgate are needed. Options at the Causeway are still under evaluation. The eventual solution will be based on sound engineering practices. Cost is a factor, but not the only factor.

Other inaccuracies appear but the most important correction is to assure the public the Corps will always keep public safety at the forefront of everything we do. We will not compromise 100-year risk reduction or public safety. We will continue to work with our partners, the State of Louisiana, levee authorities, local governments and other federal agencies to produce the hurricane and storm damage risk reduction that our region deserves and expects.

Karen Durham-Aguilera

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This is an online publication that is open to public distribution.

This issue and past issues can be found at:
<http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/hps>

Comments and questions may be sent to the Status Report Newsletter editor at:
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