

(A0004727)

Anti-Flood Plan Faces 1-Year Halt

10/19/77

(Times-Picayune Washington Bureau)

WASHINGTON — Work on the Lake Pontchartrain hurricane protection project's barrier plan will be delayed for about a year to allow further study of alternative measures, Rep. Bob Livingston, R-La., said Tuesday.

The freshman lawmaker said he reached agreement with the Corps of Engineers to temporarily halt new construction contracts on the controversial barrier features of the project to enable opponents to look further into the ecological impact of the plan and alternate means of hurricane protection.

Livingston serves on the House Public Works Committee which has jurisdiction over the water resource projects of the Corps.

"This does not mean the project is killed," Livingston explained, "but it does mean that new work on the barrier phase is halted temporarily and the delay will enable opponents to get their case in order prior to additional construction.

"Conversely, if, in fact, studies show that the barrier plan is in the best interest of the district, construction can be resumed after the 12-month delay," he said.

The project was authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1965 and the Water Resources Development Act of 1974 to provide hurricane protection for areas bordering Lake Pontchartrain and portions of St. Bernard Parish, and to control water level increases on Lake Pontchartrain during hurricane threat.

Opponents have charged that the gated barrier structures called for in the plan would adversely affect the area's navigation, as well as the local shipbuilding and fishing industries.

Environmentalists also contend that the Corps' model for the plan cannot accurately predict the effect of the

barrier on the lake's watershed.

Livingston said the temporary delay was "the best possible solution to a very difficult problem."

"The appropriations are already there," he said. "Construction is partially completed, yet there are still a number of unanswered questions which must be resolved."

Livingston said that the temporary delay of the plan's controversial portion would permit holding additional hearings and studies.

He said he will hold community hearings on the barrier plan in the First Congressional District in the "near future."

REMARKS:

Looks like I might have stored some-
thing else —
MCC

GRANT'S PRINTING

J.T. 10/22/77

Corps Plans to Continue Hurricane Levee Project At Lake Pontchartrain

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The Corps of Engineers will continue work on a hurricane-barrier project at Lake Pontchartrain, despite environmentalists' objections, Col. Early J. Rush III, district engineer, said Friday.

Rush said he is ending the newly-called moratorium on the work while he considers its possible effects on the overall project.

The moratorium was begun last week to give opponents time to study the project's environmental effects. It would have lasted a year.

Environmentalists have claimed that the hurricane barriers would wall off the lake from the Gulf of Mexico. That, they said, could turn the lake into a cesspool, inhibit navigation and increase the dangers of flooding.

The project, which eventually will cost about \$378 million, has the support of the Orleans Levee Board.

Rush said he called off the moratorium at the request of Maj. Gen. Robert C. Marshall, Corps division engineer for the

lower Mississippi River Valley.

Work began on the initial stage of the project in July. That work is at the Chef Menteur Pass and will cost \$5.2 million. It is for erecting levees which will tie in with control structures like those at the Bonnet Carre Spillway.

TYPE 10/23/77

Barriers: Time to Reflect

Rep. Robert Livingston can be congratulated on his first action affecting the First Congressional District — to delay any further work on the controversial Lake Pontchartrain barriers for one year.

He said the temporary work halt would allow time for additional hearings and environmental studies on the barriers proposed for the Chef Menteur Pass and the Rigolets. Mr. Livingston said the delay will also "enable opponents to get their case in order prior to additional construction."

But the year's delay not only gives the opponents time to further investigate the ecological impact of the plan and alternate means of hurricane protection, but also, and more importantly, gives the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers more

time to consider alternatives.

Even though the Corps engineers are firm believers in and backers of the barriers, it is evident from the long-standing and continuing opposition, that the barriers, if built, will still be a subject of wide controversy. So it would seem prudent for the Corps to look, with an open mind, to alternatives to the barriers.

Mr. Livingston's proposal seems a wise one, for there is no need to spend any more taxpayers' money at this time on a project that may be stopped in the courts and is opposed by so many segments of the population affected. He plans to hold community hearings on the barriers in his district in the near future. The Corps should be open to the opinions of citizens expressed at that time.

The Corps and the Barriers

The sudden scuttling of the agreement between Rep. Robert Livingston and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to call a temporary halt to further construction on the proposed hurricane barriers in Lake Pontchartrain leaves many old questions unanswered and raises still more.

Why would the Corps agree to a moratorium and then renege a couple of days after Rep. Livingston announced it publicly? Col. Early J. Rush III says the switch was prompted by Lower Mississippi Valley district chief Maj. Gen. Robert C. Marshall, who is concerned that the moratorium would mean a delay in the completion of the project.

Many concerns would seem to take precedence over the concern about meeting a schedule. After all, the barriers are still in a preliminary design stage, so it is hard to see how the moratorium will affect the target date. And if an alternative proves a better method of protection, it is hard to see why any more money should be spent on the barriers.

But the reconsideration reveals a much wider crack in the Corps' credibility. When accused of

promoting projects to keep their engineers busy, the Corps is quick to insist that the agency does not drum up business, but only carries out the will of Congress.

The hurricane barrier project was the child of former Rep. F. Edward Hebert, but he has retired. and Rep. Livingston, who replaced him, has proposed that the Corps hold off on further construction for one year to allow public hearings and studies on the project.

By refusing to go along with Mr. Livingston, the Corps seems to be saying that it has assumed Mr. Hebert's advocacy role for the controversial project. No one can imagine that the whole Congress cares about the project, and lack of support from the congressman whose district is involved should logically put a damper on the Corps' proceeding with the project immediately.

The Corps' failure to dampen its enthusiasm for the controversial project not only undermines its credibility but also raises the specter of a federal agency keeping itself in business with projects that do not have the full support of the public or the congressman involved.

If it wasn't so sad, the misinformation expounded by the Chachere letter would be laughable, for instance, the statement to provide flood protection "by the best means possible." No alternative plan has ever been presented. The only thing we have ever heard is, "We have looked at all the alternatives and none are feasible."

A further misleading inference is his mention of the people who drowned in Betsy in 1965. One would be led to believe that all or some of these drownings were caused by or from Lake Pontchartrain. It is common knowledge that this is not so.

The letter also mentioned that Mr. Levy and the state representative, Mr. Scoggin have misled the people of St. Tammany Parish. Nothing could be further from the truth. I am convinced that Mr. Levy and Mr. Scoggin, as well as hundreds of others who have presented testimony, have a great deal more knowledge concerning the proposed project than Mr. Chachere.

Most people are aware that the Orleans Levee Board in conjunction with the Corps of Engineers is merely being used as a tool in a land enhancement scheme of special interests, as it relates to the construction of the barriers. . .

I believe they are aware that responsible representatives of the Or-

leans Sewerage and Water Board have stated that if they could just receive \$80 to \$100 million of the \$400 million, a system of drainage could be provided for New Orleans that would assure it of never being bothered with hurricane waters or extended heavy rain water. . .

The barrier phases of the project are, indeed, not good for Orleans Parish, and are, indeed, even worse for St. Tammany and other parishes that will be affected. As Mr. Scoggin stated in his letter on the same page, I too hope that Congressman Livingston is successful in halting the construction of the barriers. The very idea of damming up these great tidal bodies (Rigolets and Chef) whether or not it provided any protection, and it has been pointed out repeatedly that it would not, is totally preposterous.

J. V. BURKES III.

Opposing Barriers

Editor, The Times-Picayune: Slidell.

Mr. C. W. Chachere (Letters, Oct. 5) takes the usual position that anyone who wishes to point out valid opposition to the barrier phases of the hurricane protection project is totally uninformed. It just happens that thousands of people oppose the barrier phases in spite of Mr. Chachere's dissertations.

Safe Hotel

New Orleans.

Editor, The Times-Picayune:

In response to Joan Treadway's article of Sept. 30, regarding high-rise hotel fire protection systems. I am disappointed that she did not mention the city's newer hotels, such as the Hyatt Regency New Orleans, as positive examples of the most modern and up-to-date facilities in hotel high-rise fire protection.

Times-Pic

10/27/77

Angry Group Opposed of Hurricane Barriers

FPic 10/30/77

By LOVELL BEAULIEU

A group of angered, and somewhat volatile, Lake Thibodaux residents who will be affected by the controversial Lake Pontchartrain hurricane barriers expressed their opposition to the project Saturday in a public hearing.

The meeting was held to discuss the recently lifted 18-month moratorium on construction of the barriers, estimated to cost \$378 million.

Speaking to the residents, many of whom claim to have weathered several devastating hurricanes, was Robert Bodet, assistant chief engineer of the Orleans Levee Board.

Bodet attempted to explain the project to the more than 100 persons who filled the Fort Pike Volunteer Community building by citing that surrounding parishes all have adequate levee protection except for the proposed barriers are to be located.

Bodet, who added that "it's hard to say you're going to block something without calling it a dam," said the present plans call for a floodgate at Chef Mouton Pass to allow passage of boats and a lock

with 21 gates at the Rigolets. There are no plans for a lock at the Chef Pass, he added.

According to Bodet, the theory of the barrier concept is, as a hurricane approaches and funnels itself into Lake Pontchartrain, the barrier will prevent water from coming into the lake and building up.

Basically, he said, the purpose of the planned barriers is to prevent water from coming in "before the hurricane arrives, rather than waiting for it to get here."

But Bodet's presentation made few strides before it was butchered by several of the seemingly disgruntled residents.

"When the water is coming in and the gates are closed, we all get the water," said one resident. "We'll always be flooded while the lake will always be alright."

At times throughout the meeting, the atmosphere became somewhat chaotic as many of the residents loudly voiced their general disapproval, and in the process drowning out Bodet. At one point, after a map illustrating the proposed barriers fell to the floor, a roar of approval came forth from the crowd.

But, despite the rowdiness of the crowd, several serious issues were raised.

State Rep. Ron Faucheaux, in whose district the barriers will be located, said the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers acted somewhat hastily in its lifting of the moratorium and more time should be given to study possible alternatives.

"We're all for hurricane protection," said Faucheaux, "but no one has justified the need for a barrier. The barrier plan could be dangerous to Orleans, St. Bernard and St. Tammany Parishes," he added.

"The least they (The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) could do is give opponents of the plan an opportunity to voice their disapproval and present their views," Faucheaux added.

In addition he said, the Corps should also look into strengthening of existing levees because the entire barrier concept seems "counter-productive."

Faucheaux said that, if the lifting of the moratorium is allowed to stand, the project could have an adverse effect on Lake Pontchartrain and Eastern New Orleans in terms of being additionally flood-prone.

Faucheaux criticized the Corps for failing to study similar projects in addition to this one.

"What's happened all over the country is the U.S. Army didn't take individual and local needs into account when various water projects were being planned."

Also at the meeting was a representative of U.S. Rep. Bob Livingston, who originally pushed for and won the moratorium on construction of the project. Livingston also is a member of the House Public Works Committee, which has jurisdiction over all Corps of Engineers water resource projects. Livingston earlier said he planned on holding several community meetings to discuss the project.

Let's Give Corps a Grandiose Project

By NEWTON E. RENFRO

The Lake Pontchartrain Barriers has been rejected, started, cancelled and restarted so many times that the average citizen is in danger of losing sight of the central issue, which is that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers needs work.

The barriers supposedly would close off the lake from the rushing, wind-driven tides of a hurricane blowing in from the Southeast. All the arguments about whether the barriers would be environmentally sound or would divert flood waters to St. Bernard or St. Tammany Parishes or would turn the lake into a cesspool are not precisely relevant to the Corps. As ambitious flood control projects go hereabouts, it may not be a good one, but it is the only one they've got — and, by George, they're going to keep it.

Building levees does not excite the Corps' imagination. There are bunches of folks who think the way to protect the city from the feared "killer hurricane" (never mind that such a storm has never been recorded) is to build high levees, but the Corps resists the notion. One of the reasons heard against levees is that they would block the view of folks who live near the lake, and that may be a fair assessment. Maybe those folks would rather risk being washed away than give up their breathtaking view of flat brown water.

In any case, the area's congressman, Bob Livingston, is having a difficult time getting a commitment out of the Corps. Friday a week ago, Livingston announced that the Corps' local district chief, Col. Early J. Rush III (that is really his name; I did not make it up), had agreed to delay the project for a year so that opponents might have time to study its effects (leaving unspoken whether the Corps feels any need to study the barrier's effects). The next day, Rush announced that his boss, Maj. Gen. Robert C. Marshall had contrarily decided the project should go ahead after all. The word of an officer and a gentleman.

Never mind. Clearly, the Corps will proceed full blast on this thing, common sense, scientific evidence and public opinion notwithstanding, unless somebody finds them a bigger toy to play with.

Therefore, in the public interest, I offer some alternative Grandiose Projects (GP) to hold the Corps' interest and divert its bulldozers and dredges from the barrier.

GP Number One is a giant plexiglass bubble over the city. This should be considered merely a temporary diversion and proof that our hearts are in the right place. Such a scheme is impractical, but there is no evidence that it has ever stopped the Corps before, so they will spend some time savoring the idea and drawing up preliminary plans. By the time they discover that the city has already constructed a more modest version of this design and is not disposed to undertake another, GP Number Two will be ready.

This is the Great Wall of New Orleans. It should better suit the Corps' predilection toward concrete and steel yet serve basically the same purpose as levees. A levee has no panache, no grace, no architectural style — being, at bottom, just a long pile of dirt — but a wall requires blueprints and diagrams, with strong, ruled lines and stress formulae. As an added attraction and engineering challenge, large windows could also be included, thus answering the objection to levees concerning the lovely view.

GP Number Three would provide not only concrete but also dredging, which the Corps dearly loves. Aircraft fuel tanks prevent sloshing with rows of fins attached to the inner walls. These "baffles" break the flow of liquid. Where a barrier would prevent high tides from getting into the lake, several

Clearly, the Corps will proceed full blast on this thing, common sense, scientific evidence and public opinion notwithstanding, unless somebody finds them a bigger toy to play with.

underwater concrete walls parallel to the shore could act as baffles and break the tidal force before it could build up and sweep over the levees. To keep them clear of silt, they would have to be dredged in the gaps periodically, and the Corps would love it.

A drawback is that it does not involve machinery, which is one of the engineering attractions of those moveable barrier gates. GP Number Four, giant pumps, to drain the lake in advance of a hurricane, would require huge machines. They might not be as sensually satisfying as rumbling gates or as much fun as toy trains, but they will do.

If the Corps insists on machines that push or pull, GP Number Five might be better. It would consist of a great hollow shell under the lake or nearby (salt domes might come in handy for this) and a hole in the lake's floor, stopped by a giant cork. In the event of a hurricane, the cork could be pulled quickly by a giant hand operated by complex machinery, and the water would drain in a matter of minutes. After the storm, we could then either pump the old brackish water back in or let in brand new Gulf salt water.

Any one of these plans is certain to cost more than the barrier (making it acceptable to engineers and contractors), would require years of work, and would challenge the Corps' best brains.

S&WB and Lake

11-2-77

New Orleans.

Editor, The Times-Picayune:

I noted Oct. 27 a letter from J. V. Burkes III with reference to the Sewerage and Water Board in connection with the barrier plan for hurricane protection.

These references to the Sewerage and Water Board and the allegations of expenditures relative to hurricane waters are completely erroneous.

The board proposes to "waterproof" one of its large pumps at each of the outfall stations pumping to Lake Pontchartrain so that when the project hurricane does, in fact, hit New Orleans and Lake Pontchartrain is dumped into the city we will upon subsidence of the tides in Lake Pontchartrain (following the hurricane) have the capability of pumping out the water that will come into the lake in the absence of having the barriers constructed which would prevent this rise of tide in Lake Pontchartrain.

To reiterate, the board has no plans for hurricane protection. Its plans are, however, to be able to pump out the city after the project hurricane has dumped the waters of Lake Pontchartrain into the city over the levels of the existing levees and sea walls in the area between Point Aux Herbes on the east to the Orleans-Jefferson parish line.

STUART H. BREHM JR.,
Executive Director,
Sewerage and Water Board

Stage Set for States to Regain Wetland Control

11/11/77

By KENNETH A. WEISS

(Times-Picayune Washington Correspondent)

WASHINGTON — Senate and House conferees approved compromise legislation Thursday that sets the stage for states to eventually reclaim from the federal government major authority to regulate development of wetland areas.

The unexpected accord ended more than two years of often bitter debate in Congress over proposed amendments to the Clean Water Act — a debate that centered in large part on the future of the nation's vanishing but ecologically-important wetlands.

Under present law, the Army Corps of Engineers has broad authority to regulate dredging and dumping activities in wetland areas.

The compromise, however, would enable states with approved management plans — such as coastal zone management plans — and areawide planning programs approved by the Environmental Protection Agency, to regain authority to issue dredge and fill permits for wetland activity.

The conferees, however, also approved a broad exemption from the permitting requirement for all federal projects in wetlands, as are specifically authorized by Congress, and on which environmental impact statements have been prepared and submitted.

Spokesmen for several environmental groups expressed concern with the sweeping federal project exemption.

Also exempted from the permitting requirement are normal farming, ranching and forestry operations in

wetland areas.

Rep. John Breaux, D-La., one of the House conferees and the author of a controversial wetlands proposal that had been denounced by environmentalists, termed the Senate-House compromise "a rational and balanced approach."

"Decisions under the Clean Water Act should have maximum state and local participation and states which have sound management programs should be allowed to run their own programs without having to go to Washington for every decision," Breaux said.

The fight over the wetlands stems

from a 1975 federal court ruling which held that the federal government had sweeping authority to regulate activities in wetland areas, which the court broadly defined to include virtually all waters of the United States, including small streams and ponds far inland.

The House approved a plan by Breaux and Rep. Jim Wright, D-Tex., that would have rolled back federal authority to those wetlands along traditionally navigable rivers and streams.

The Senate refused to go along, however, and approved its own plan maintaining federal protection of wetland areas.

Give Him at Least a Merry Christmas

Little seven-year-old Johnny only recently learned that people sleep in beds.

Moreover, he didn't know people ate three meals a day. And Johnny is just becoming accustomed to using bathroom facilities which he never had at home.

He didn't have any Halloween trick-or-treating this year, because his parents spent the better part of that weekend in jail. He was left alone at home.

But maybe someone will think enough of Johnny to see he has a good Christmas like other boys and

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Never
We Will

Levee Board and the

11/15/77

New Orleans.

Editor, The Times-Picayune:

This is in response to the editorial "Lake Study Still Needed" which appeared Nov. 3 and mentioned both the Levee Board and the writer by name.

The Times-Picayune, in this editorial and in others, attempts to place the Orleans Levee Board in the posture of a callous destroyer of lake bottoms and wetlands. We do not see ourselves in this light, and we believe The Times-Picayune does a grave injustice to this board and to those citizens who serve on the board, putting in many hours monthly without pay.

The Orleans Levee Board agrees that a comprehensive environmental study of the Lake Pontchartrain ecosystem is needed. It has been estimated that the cost of such a study could be in the millions of dollars and would take several years to complete. The board does not have the resources to fund such a study.

Another of our legislatively mandated responsibilities is to own and operate Lakefront Airport.

Prior to the expansion Lakefront is now undergoing a comprehensive environmental study. An Environmental Impact Statement was prepared, circu-

lated and approved by all governmental agencies. Public hearings were held. All approvals of all state and federal agencies responsible for preserving the environment were obtained.

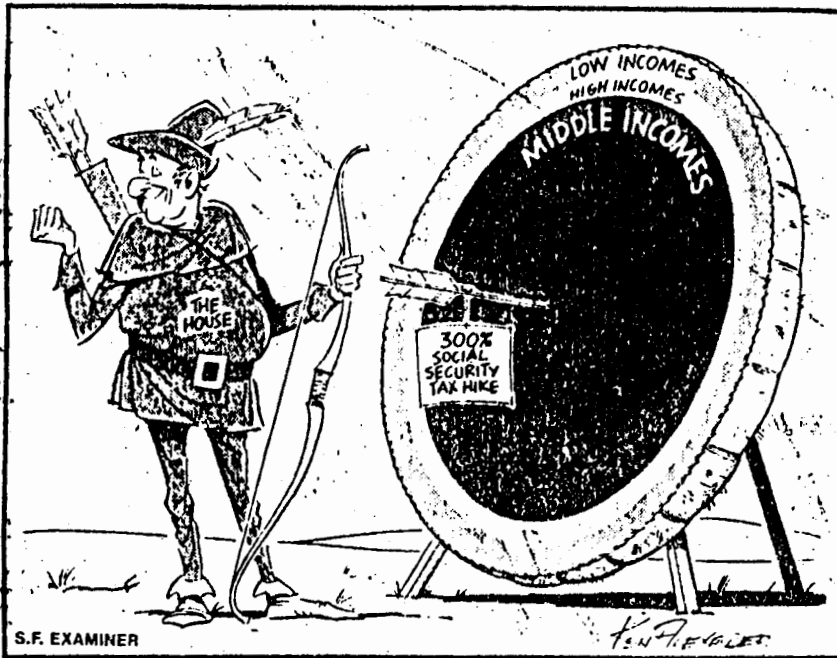
We were brought into federal court by an environmental group seeking to stop the expansion of the airport. They could not prove that any harm would occur to the Lake Pontchartrain Ecosystem from the work and the judge ruled in our favor. The project was justified and construction procedures were designed to create the least harm to the lake. What more does The Times-Picayune want us to do?

Another responsibility of the Orleans Levee Board is to own and operate the Orleans Marina. Studies conducted by the Levee Board, articles on which have appeared in both The Times-Picayune and The States-Item, as well as pressures from boating groups all point out the need for more marinas to serve New Orleans.

Coast Guard regulations now require approved non-polluting marine sanitation devices to be installed on all boats starting on Jan. 1, 1978. All marinas must be constructed with sanitary facilities. This was not the law when I made the statement as a member of the Lake Pontchartrain Sanitary Board in 1974 that "we need to control sanitary waste from boats."

Prior to the construction of any new marina in Lake Pontchartrain an environmental study will have to be made. Again, I ask what do you want us to do? A study is not a solution to a demand.

GUY F. LeMIEUX,
President,
Orleans Levee Board.



Public to Have Say on Hurricane Barrier

By KENNETH A. WEISS

(Times-Picayune Washington Correspondent)

WASHINGTON — The Corps of Engineers is still refusing to impose a one-year moratorium on construction of Lake Pontchartrain hurricane barriers, but says there's enough time before contracts are awarded in May for public comment on the controversial project.

"There are no contracts scheduled for award on barrier components until next May," Maj. Gen R.C. Marshall, the Corps' Division Engineer in Vicksburg, told U.S. Rep. Bob Livingston, R-La.

"Thus it would appear that time is available for any public meetings you may wish to hold," Marshall added in a letter to the freshman lawmaker.

Livingston, who had initially gotten agreement from the Corps for a one-year construction moratorium before the deal was squelched by Marshall, expressed satisfaction with the new plan.

He said the House Public Works Committee has scheduled a hearing in New Orleans on the barrier plan on Jan. 6, and expressed hope that "gives us ample time to thrash out the issue" before contracts are awarded in May.

"As far as I'm concerned, I'm satisfied we'll at least be able to have the hearing," Livingston said. "It may be necessary before May to put it (the contract awarding) back a little, but at least we'll have some breathing time now," he said.

Back in October, Livingston announced that agreement on a one-year moratorium on construction of the barriers had been reached with Col. Early J. Rush III, the Corps' district engineer at New Orleans. But the agreement lasted less than a week when Marshall requested reconsideration of the deal to study the possible impact of a year-long delay.

In his letter to Livingston, Marshall left open the possibility he may order a delay later, but expressed concern about the effect of a lengthy delay on hurricane protection in the New Orleans metropolitan area.

"Delay in construction of the barrier plan could jeopardize a highly vulnerable metropolitan area for a longer period of time," Marshall warned.

Marshall said he has asked Rush to review the matter and "to submit to me at an early date any recommendations he may have. I will promptly consider them and make my decision."

"I am very concerned about delays to any Congressionally authorized and funded project," Marshall said.

11/27/77
In this case my initial decision to remain with the current schedule in no way forecloses my option to delay the barrier plan should such a delay be recommended and justified by the District Engineer," he added.

Livingston had pushed for the one-year moratorium in order to give critics of the project time to re-examine possible environmental impacts of raising levees to afford hurricane protection for areas bordering the lake and portions of St. Bernard Parish.

Environmentalists worry about the potential effects of "walling off" the lake from the Gulf of Mexico. They say such action could turn the lake into a virtual cesspool, inhibit navigation, and increase the dangers of flooding.

Livingston, who serves on the Public Works Committee which has jurisdiction over water resource projects built by the Corps, said the delay would "enable opponents to get their case in order prior to additional construction."

"Conversely, if, in fact, studies show that the barrier plan is in the best interest of the district, construction can be resumed after the 12-month delay," Livingston said in October.

Livingston said Friday that with new contracts not scheduled for awarding until May, and a hearing in January, he hoped there will be enough time for opponents to express their views.

"Perhaps we'll be able to get this matter resolved to the satisfaction of all parties," he said.

Livingston said his main concern is "to give everybody his say" on the barrier project.