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Stage set to speed Jefferson hurricane work

Federal-state agreement is first with U.S. paying all the costs

NEW ORLEANS – Hurricane protection construction will be accelerated by an agreement by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Jefferson Parish authorities that opens the way for the federal government to pay 100 percent of the costs.

“This is for construction planned before Katrina, when costs were shared 70 percent federal and 30 percent non-federal. Post-Katrina, the Congress has provided the money to accelerate the work,” said Al Naomi, a Corps senior project manager.

The agreement and another for St. Charles Parish are the first to take advantage of the new cost-sharing arrangement.

To put the Congress’s wishes into effect, the project cooperation agreement was signed Wednesday by the Corps, Jefferson Parish government and the East Jefferson Levee District for \$37.8 million of levee, floodwall and pump station construction along Lake Pontchartrain.

The agreement and another for St. Charles Parish are the first to take advantage of the new cost-sharing arrangement.

Levee elevations will be increased two to three feet to compensate for subsidence in two reaches:

--Kenner, 2 miles from Duncan Canal to St. Charles Parish.

--Metairie, 2.3 miles from Suburban Canal to Elmwood Canal.

All four east Jefferson pump stations will be improved. Backflow prevention will be completed by installing sluice gates at the lake end of 13 discharge tubes. Most of the time, the sluice gates will be open. When needed, they would be lowered to block storm surge.

Taller, stronger and more resilient floodwalls will be built between the lakefront levee and the Elmwood and Suburban Canal pump stations, and at the south end of the West Return Floodwall alongside Armstrong International Airport.

The Corps and local officials are developing comprehensive plans for more work beyond these first projects. The plans will provide long-term solutions to hurricane protection for the entire project in east Jefferson.

The pump station improvements will include floodwall tie-ins and fronting and backflow protection. Fronting protection will continue the floodwall across the lakeside of the pump station. Backflow protection will provide sluice gates that can be lowered over the discharge tubes to block storm surge.

Design work is under way, and the Corps expects to begin awarding contracts in weeks immediately ahead.