

COMPLETE STATEMENT

OF

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BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISASTER RECOVERY
AND
THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATE, LOCAL, AND
PRIVATE SECTOR PREPAREDNESS AND INTEGRATION**

UNITED STATES SENATE

ON

**ST. FRANCIS LEVEE DISTRICT
MISSISSIPPI RIVER AND TRIBUTARIES PROJECT**

JULY 28, 2010

INTRODUCTION

Madam Chairman, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I wish to thank each of you for the invitation to be here today and to discuss with you the different concerns that we as Local Citizens have with the FEMA flood map modernization process. My name is Rob Rash, I'm a Professional Engineer and currently serve as the Chief Executive Officer and Chief Engineer of the St. Francis Levee District of Arkansas with Headquarters in West Memphis, Arkansas. It may be of information for this Subcommittee to know that our Levee Board has been in existence since 1893 and my area of responsibility lies in the Delta Area of extreme North East Arkansas and covers seven (7) Counties with 160 miles of Main Line Mississippi River Levees and 75 miles of St. Francis River Tributary Levees.

HISTORY OF MR&T

The previously described levees are a part of the Mississippi River & Tributaries Flood Control Project which contains a total of 3,787 miles of Levees along with other structures such as Floodwalls, Floodways, Floodplains, Diversions, Reservoirs, Pumping Plants and every other proven method to prevent flooding from the 41% of the waters of the United States that flow to the Gulf of Mexico. Since the MR&T Project is a unique, one of a kind Federal Flood Control Project let me just say that the Law that established the Project states that the project for flood control of the Mississippi River in its alluvial valley is adopted and authorized as set forth and recommended in the report submitted by the Chief of Engineers and printed in House Document Number 90. That document states that the Flood used in the design of this plan is that predicted by the Weather Bureau as the "maximum possible" and by the Mississippi River Commission as the "maximum probable". For the sake of time I have not quoted the Law nor the Document exactly nor in their entirety. It may be well to partially quote a little more of the Law that says that the works and outlets constructed under the provisions of this Act shall be built in a manner and of a character which will FULLY and AMPLY protect the adjacent lands. This law and this Project has served the Country well because for the past 82 years no Project Levee built to MRC Standards has ever failed despite Major Floods in 9 of those years, some of Record Proportions.

FEMA MAP MODERNIZATION

As I'm sure you all know, Flood Maps are not new to us. The thing that is new is the fact that all the area that lies behind the Levees within the boundaries of the St. Francis Levee District of Arkansas on the old Flood Maps were Zone X which meant that the area was protected to a 500 year flood and there was no need for Flood Insurance. Now that same area has a new designation known as Shaded Zone X which we are told means that Flood Insurance is not MANDATORY but is RECOMMENDED. History shows us that when Insurance is recommended to the Mortgage holder or Lender then they insist that Insurance be purchased.

The millions of citizens that have and those that do now inhabit the Alluvial Valley of the Lower Miss. River have paid Levee Taxes for over 100 years; they consider that these taxes have been paid in lieu of Flood Insurance. The Levee Taxes are collected and expended by the Levee Boards to finance the day-to-day Maintenance of the Levees. It is of great concern

to us that the citizens of the Valley are not going to purchase Flood Insurance AND pay Levee Taxes (the local peoples investment on our local levee system since we began building it in the early 1800's is in excess of \$17 Billion, which includes the building of the original levee and maintenance over the last 150 years.

If our fears are valid then the day-to-day maintenance will cease and the Levees will deteriorate and the entire 35,000 square miles of the Lower Miss. River Valley will be periodically flooded and not fit for human habitation. This will create an economic disaster that this Country has never experienced. The Flood Plain of the Lower Mississippi River is in places 100 miles wide and averages 50 miles wide and is 600 miles long. The Flood of 1927 stopped all East-West Commerce for a period of about four months. In today's economic environment, the cost to this Country is beyond comprehension. Quoting our friends and neighbors in Louisiana: "Without Flood Control, Nothing Else Matters."

CONCLUSION

In my letter of invitation to appear before this Committee I was asked for my recommendations. My first recommendation would be that FEMA use the best Engineering and Hydraulic Information available in their revisions of the Flood Rate Insurance Maps and that they discontinue their practice of considering every Flood Protection Area in the Nation as being the same when in fact every area is different. FEMA needs to take into consideration what has been done to protect against Floods and they also need to consider what the demands for the sale of more and more Flood Insurance will have on the economy of the Nation. We are aware of the need that FEMA has to collect funds but we are also aware of the consequences that their present actions will have on the future of the Nation, especially in the rich alluvial valleys that produce so much that is necessary in our day to day lives, including but not limited to the majority of the food and fiber required. The Mississippi River is a critical natural resource and one of our Nation's greatest assets. At 2,320 miles it ranks as one of the world's largest rivers supplying eighteen million people with drinking water and linking agricultural, timber, coal and other producers to markets around the world. Each year, the Mississippi River valley generates more than \$12 billion in agricultural and forest products and \$213 billion in manufacturing goods.

Anglers, boaters, hunters, bird-watchers, tourists, and other enthusiasts pour another \$20 billion into the 10 states that border the river. The river also supports a myriad of wildlife. It is a vital migration corridor for 40 percent of all North American waterfowl and 60 percent of North America's bird species. In all, the Mississippi River basin supports 25 percent of all fish species in North America and a high diversity of freshwater mussels.

I shall end my Statement with that thought and will be happy to attempt to answer any questions the Committee may have.