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March 7, 2008

The Honorable Ike Skelton
United States Representative
4th District-Missouri
RHOB 2206
Washington, District of Columbia 20515

Dear Congressman Skelton:

During a recent conversation in Jefferson City, with one of our members, Paul W. LePage, you requested a letter outlining our concerns regarding the ongoing levee repairs and rehabilitation following the 2007, spring flood event. As you know, there are 31 Projects representing 41 levees being repaired through the Corps of Engineers' PL84-99 Levee Rehabilitation Program. A list of these projects and their current status can be found on the Corps of Engineers website at:
www.nwk.usace.army.mil/Flood2007/RehabRequest.htm

In addition to the levees being repaired through the Corps of Engineers program, there are many others, not in the PL84-99 Program, being repaired with funds from various grants, USDA programs, and by the local levee districts or landowners themselves. Most of these repairs have been completed, as the process for them has been much faster than the process the PL84-99 levees have been going through.

While we are pleased to see several contracts being awarded and work beginning at many locations, we do have concerns about the long-drawn-out process the Corps has been going through over the past eight or nine months. We believe the levee repair process has taken far too long. Delays during the summer months have extended the repair work into winter and this spring. Had the process been more streamline, we feel many of these repairs may have been completed during the late summer and fall when conditions were much more suitable for construction work.

Shortly after the 2007 flood event, the Corps of Engineers sent reconnaissance crews out to survey levee damages. This process was completed quickly and the area offices in Napoleon and Glasgow put together their reports for the District office in Kansas City. My understanding is these reports arrived in Kansas City in mid-June to early July. Once in Kansas City, each project must go through a series of approvals, including environmental, economic, engineering, legal, and others. These approvals took a very long time. The approvals took way too long in our estimation. Finally, late in the year, the approval processed moved to the Division level in Omaha where the projects were reviewed over about a week's time. By the time the approvals were made and the area offices were ready to begin the actual contracting work, winter had arrived.

Naturally, we are concerned, levees damaged during the May 6-21, 2007, flood event have still not been repaired. We understand the surveying, engineering, and design of these repairs does take some time. However, the delays in this case happened during the approval process at the District level. There are many steps the projects must go through and the process was slow by anyone's calendar. It is our hope a way can be found to speed the approval process in the future.

Colonel Roger A. Wilson, Jr., District Engineer, has indicated a review of the levee rehabilitation process will be conducted when all repairs have been completed. Levees in the PL84-99 program are inspected every two years by the Corps of Engineers. It seems much of the approval process the projects went through at the District level could be completed and updated during each Corps regular inspections. This would allow the levees to be at least partially pre-approved prior to a flood event. The levee district and Corps of Engineers would then know, before the event happened, their levees meet a number of the requirements and those time-consuming reviews would not have to delay the rehabilitation process, when time is most important. In addition, those individuals conducting the review and approvals at the District level should be encouraged to expedite their work. It must be made clear to them the importance of moving the projects through the process in a timelier manner. These are emergency repairs, which should be given the highest priority by each individual involved at every step along the way.

Our hope is the levee repairs will be completed in time for the fast approaching planting season. I hope you will encourage the Corps of Engineers to follow through with a complete review of the PL84-99 bureaucratic process. Our Association is willing to work with the Corps to find a way to speed the process and be better prepared for the next flood event.

I appreciate your interest in this matter and hope I have been able to answer questions you may have had regarding our concerns. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of more help. As always, thank you for your continuing support of the levee and drainage districts across Missouri. We appreciate all your efforts and hard work on our behalf.

Sincerely,

Tom Waters, Chairman
Missouri Levee & Drainage District Association

cc: Colonel Roger A. Wilson, Jr. Kansas City District Engineers, USACE
Mr. Paul W. LePage, 1003 Rock Hill Road, Jefferson City, Missouri 65101