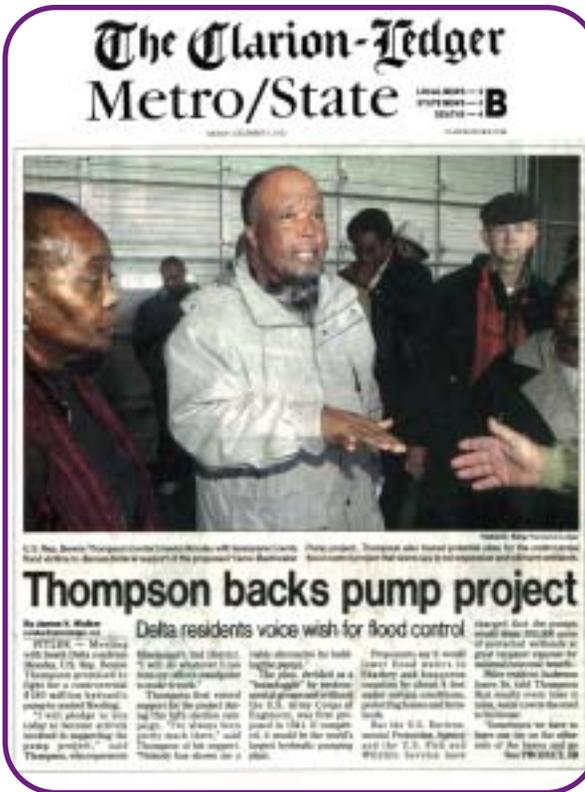


Congressman Bennie Thompson endorses pump project

In a special South Delta tour, organized by the Greenville-based Mississippi Levee Board and the South Delta Flood Control Committee on Monday, December 2, 2002, U.S. Representative Bennie Thompson pledged to support the Yazoo Backwater Pump Project and other flood control initiatives.

Thompson, who has been on record as a supporter of the project, said at a public gathering near Valley Park, MS after the tour that "I will pledge to you today to become actively involved in supporting the pump project. I will do whatever I can from my office's standpoint to make it work."

Joined by legislative director Lanier Avant, Thompson was briefed in a presentation given by Levee Board Chief Engineer Jim Wanamaker at the Steele Bayou Drainage Structure, site of the proposed Yazoo Backwater Pump. Commissioners of the Levee Board, as well as representatives from the South Delta Flood Control Committee and various media outlets, were also on hand for the tour.



Several times a year, the Mississippi Levee Board provides a tour of the project area to state and federal dignitaries to demonstrate the need for the Yazoo Backwater Project and to give these individuals the opportunity to meet with local citizens affected by flood water in the region. Attorney General Mike Moore was provided the tour last January.

After visiting the proposed site for the pump, Congressman Thompson was shown the Mahannah Wildlife Refuge where he was briefed on timber and wildlife impacts from flooding and given a perspective on water management in the area by Scott Baker, Wildlife Biologist with the MS Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. The tour concluded at the Catledge Shop near Valley Park, where Thompson spoke with, and heard from, local citizens gathered to discuss the effects of flooding on the area's economy and standard of living.

"Nobody has shown me a viable alternative (to building the pump)," Thompson stated to the group of approximately 50 on hand. - MSLB

Senate shows support for Pump Project



Senator Thad Cochran

Mississippi senators in January easily beat back an attempt to cut funding for a controversial Delta flood control project in the first challenge on the Senate floor to a Mississippi project since Sen. Trent Lott resigned as majority leader.

By a 68-29 vote, senators killed an amendment by Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) to slash \$14 million in startup construction funds for the Yazoo Pumping Plant from a catch-all spending bill. The total cost of the project, first authorized in 1941, is estimated at \$181 million.

McCain said the pumping plant would drain 200,000 acres of wetland for the benefit of a few wealthy landowners to collect federal farm subsidies.

Senator Thad Cochran said that wasn't true. He said the latest plan by the Corps of Engineers would acquire 62,000 acres of farmland for reforestation.

"The purpose is not to create new agricultural opportunities," said Cochran. "It is to prevent the flooding of schools and hospitals and businesses."

Lott made a point of saying that there are over 1,000 homes that will be protected by the project. He met last week with five residents from Sharkey/Issaquena Counties who wanted the plant built.

Tennessee and Arkansas senators sided with the Mississippians on the vote. - MSLB

Corps Corner

Brigadier General Don T. Riley

Commander, Mississippi Valley Division
President-designee, Mississippi River Commission



US Army Corps
of Engineers®



General Riley

Brigadier General Don T. Riley, assumed command of the Mississippi Valley Division (MVD), Vicksburg, Miss., Sept. 19, 2002. He also serves as President-designee of the Mississippi River Commission (MRC). Riley came to MVD from Heidelberg, Germany, where he served as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Engineer Headquarters, U.S. Army Europe.

As MVD Commander, Riley plays a vital role in managing the Corps water resources program in the Mississippi

River Valley. The boundary of the Mississippi Valley Division extends from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, includes portions of 12 states, and encompasses 370,000 square miles. The pro-

grams and activities overseen by the MVD and MRC are conducted by district offices located in St. Paul, Minn., Rock Island, Ill., St. Louis, Mo., Memphis, Tenn., Vicksburg, Miss., and New Orleans, La.

Gen. Riley is a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., and was commissioned in the Corps of Engineers in 1973. He earned a master's degree in civil engineering from the University of California, Berkeley, and is a registered Professional Engineer in the state of California.

He is a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, School of Advanced Military Studies, and the United States Army War College.

Gen. Riley is originally from Hayward, Calif., and is married to the former Roslyn Shelton of Shreveport, La. They have four children: Devin, Darren, Daniel, and Caitlyn. - **MSLB**

Quail Project improving habitat in the Delta

By **Trey Cooke**
Executive Director, Delta Wildlife, Inc.

Bobwhite Quail populations have plummeted throughout the Southeast since the 1950's. Scientists have identified the major cause to be habitat loss from land use changes.

In the early 1900's, the basic farm consisted of several small agricultural fields, several pastures for livestock, and some woodland. The patchwork design of these farms provided quail with all their necessary habitat needs within a small area. Quail had access to bare ground, grasslands, vertical cover, food resources, and nesting areas. Today, the majority of these patchwork farms have been transformed into one large agricultural field or pine plantation, neither of which can sustain large quail populations. Understanding that land use changes are driven by technology and economics, scientists quickly realized that habitat restorations plans had to be developed that would conform to existing land uses and management.

In 2001, Delta Wildlife, the 12-year old non-profit dedicated to wildlife habitat restoration in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, began to compile all of the proposed Bobwhite Quail habitat restoration prescriptions developed by research biologists over the past decade. After reviewing the data, it was evident that existing quail populations could increase in number 10-fold by establishing narrow strips of habitat along field borders and ditches. Working with biologists from Mississippi State University and the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, Delta Wildlife then developed a 3-year

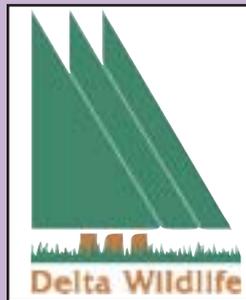
project designed to restore quail habitat on more than 50-miles of field borders on agricultural landscapes in Northwest Mississippi. Today, the project is known as the Delta Wildlife Quail and Grassland Songbird Habitat Restoration Project.

In the spring of 2002, Delta Wildlife planted 16.27 miles of Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem, Indiangrass, Kobe lespedeza, and Partridge Pea along field borders in the Mississippi Delta. These areas were monitored throughout the summer to document bird utilization and diversity within these newly established areas. Bobwhite Quail were observed utilizing the project areas during the first growing season, along with 69 other bird species.

Other wildlife species benefited from the first year of the project. Whitetail deer were observed traveling and bedding in the field borders. Small mammals including rabbits and field mice quickly populated the areas after the adjacent crops were harvested.

The field borders established this spring also generated significant water quality benefits. Sediment loss from adjacent field before project implementation measured 2,911.7 tons per year. After the field borders were established, the sediment loads were reduced to only 606.2 tons per year, a 79.2% reduction. This reduction in sediment improves water quality and fisheries in adjacent lakes and streams.

According to Bill Kennedy, Delta Wildlife President, "Delta Wildlife is extremely proud of the project design and the quality habitat it has created in the first year of the project. The USDA-NRCS has even used the project design to establish a new field border practice that will be eligible for cost sharing under EQIP." - **MSLB**



"Clarion-Ledger" flood plan is all wet

In response to the latest editorial regarding the Yazoo Backwater Pump Project, I must say that I am among many Mississippians who find *The Clarion-Ledger's* position to be inconsistent.



Senator Trent Lott

While *The Clarion-Ledger* continually crusades against this flood-control project for the Delta—one of the poorest regions of our state and nation—it promotes with considerable zeal the great need and urgency to control flooding in the city of Jackson, albeit not on the same day's editorial page. I think we need to do both.

Unlike *The Clarion-Ledger* Editorial Board, Congressman Bennie Thompson, Sen. Thad Cochran and myself are charged with representing an entire populace. We are here to represent Mississippi's people and to be responsive to the communities they comprise. Our approach on south Delta flooding must be broad, beneficial and reflective of people actually living in the Mississippi Delta, instead of outside our state.

Judging from decades of input from Delta officials, citizens and other Delta leaders, I am convinced that the Yazoo Backwater Pump is a worthwhile project.

The Clarksdale Press Register—a paper whose readers and employees actually live and work in the Delta—said it best in a Jan. 22 editorial, noting that opponents incorrectly point to "wealthy planters" as being the beneficiaries of this project. The paper correctly argued that quite the opposite is the case, as pump opponents are ignoring the "critical need for economic development in perhaps Mississippi's poorest region." The area's double-digit unemployment is without doubt linked to the land's tendency to flood.

If *The Clarion-Ledger*, Washington bureaucrats and some environmental groups have their way in the south Delta, a lot of folks there will have to start packing their bags. While *The Clarion-Ledger* quite rightfully advocates the need to construct flood control projects in Jackson, the only solution to south Delta flooding I see promoted by *The Clarion-Ledger* editorial board is for the government to forcefully take the property of residents and businesses there and then simply just let the land flood. Forcing thousands of people to uproot doesn't sound like much of a plan to me.

Let's be clear: No project by man is going to totally stop flooding in the Mississippi Delta, but we can work to minimize the loss of life and property in future floods, which is exactly what this project will do.

Minimizing flooding is what we have done in Mississippi for more than 100 years, and we have made dramatic progress since the disastrous 1927 flood.

Just think, if *The Clarion-Ledger's* current "plan" for south Delta flooding had been employed in Jackson for all those years, the levees around Jackson's Pearl River would have never been built, and the paper's newsroom might be underwater right now.

Trent Lott
United States Senator
Pascagoula

From *The Clarion-Ledger*, January 30, 2003

Yazoo Pump Project helps all in the Delta

In the case of this newspaper's longstanding editorial view opposing the Yazoo Backwater Pump Project, I first want to point out that unlike *The Clarion Ledger*, I am elected to represent and legislate in the Congress on behalf of the people of a district which saw no meaningful economic development until a federal commitment was made by the Congress in 1928, to protect the Delta from floodwaters that accumulate from rainfall which occurs over 31 states in this nation.



Congressman Bennie Thompson

I speak to the points offered in your editorial ("Boondoggle: Yazoo Pump is still a bad idea.")

This is our Project

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers does not invent projects; rather, it responds to local concerns for balanced and viable solutions to flooding problems.

These concerns are then channeled into a congressional office such as mine, and we then must determine if the Corps' solution to the problem is compatible with the careful balance, which should be struck between the local economy and the local environment.

In the case of the Yazoo Backwater Pump Project, after carefully reviewing the huge compromises made by the interested parties, I consider it "our" project, not the Corps' project.

Incidentally, *The Clarion Ledger* should know that I was sold on the merits of this federal project.

As for the newspaper's continued emphasis on who the project benefits, I am satisfied this project will be a plus to every segment of the economy and that the communities of the five-county project area will benefit from reduced flooding as a result of the pump.

As for the people who will benefit most from the pumps, one only needs to meet the people of the south Delta who relate authentic stories about having to pull a boat full of children to a school bus, or being forced out of their houses because of raw sewage back flowing out of their toilets, to know that lowering the water during flooding periods in the south Delta makes common sense.

As for the environment, it is unlikely that any outdoor recreational activities can be sustained for the economic or social benefit of the south Delta if one is sitting on a park bench that has a foot of water under it.

Moving out not a solution

The editorial's reference to the Environmental Projection Agency report which essentially makes an offer to write checks to each household in the south Delta in exchange for asking them to move out is a ludicrous idea.

As for your suggestion that the EPA would use pump funding to build new roads, new houses, provide job programs and other federal services, I would point out that there is no congressional authority nor is there any federal precedent for utilizing these funds in this way.

Additionally, why would one need new roads and new houses, much less job programs, in order to ride around and look at people moving out of their houses?

In reflecting on my study of the flooding problems, my half-day tour of the south Delta, and your Dec. 4 editorial challenging my decision to support this solution for flooding in the 2nd District, I would simply offer that I am not the one who has been "sucked in," but rather somebody else has been "sucked in."

I challenge you, as the largest newsprint outlet in our state, to accept this invitation to come to the south Delta as my guest in order to determine for yourselves who has really been "sucked in" — the newspaper or me.

Bennie Thompson
U.S. Representative - Bolton

From *The Clarion-Ledger*, January 20, 2003

Reforestation Celebration

On February 14, 2003, the Vicksburg District Corps of Engineers held a ceremony at Riverside High School to celebrate the planting of the 20,000th acre of reforestation of mitigation land in the Mississippi Delta. Unavoidable adverse impacts to bottom-land hardwoods associated with channelization, and levee construction projects resulted in the loss of wildlife habitat and timber. The loss of wildlife habitat and timber units associated with construction projects are being mitigated through artificial reforestation of marginal croplands, in order to return the area to native conditions.



Students from Riverside High School help Congressman Bennie Thompson plant a tree within the 20,000th acre of reforested mitigation land. Gen. Don Riley, Col. Rick Clapp, Bill Hobgood and Fred Ballard, President of the Mississippi Levee Board, look on.

After the Corps purchases the land, it is generally leased for agricultural farming prior to reforestation. Leasing the land saves site preparation costs and generates revenue through the lease program.

Hand planting is the method of choice due to equipment limitations on areas during the winter season. With adequate ground moisture, the land is then planted between 1 December through 15 March of each year. An experienced planter can plant between 1,500 to 2,500 trees per day (or 5 - 8 acres).

In the past 13 years, 20,000 acres have been reforested to bottom-land hardwood. The total number of

seedlings planted exceeds 6 million with the primary species consisting of Nuttall Oak, Willow Oak, Water Oak, Green Ash, and Bald Cypress.

The reforestation of these areas restores a functional wetland ecosystem and provides wildlife habitat and timber in the Delta, which was lost in the early 1960's through widespread clearing when soybean prices soared. Through proper management, this project ensures a resource for future generations to utilize and enjoy and guarantees that previous practices will not be repeated. - **MSLB**

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Delta citizens take their case to Washington

A group of frustrated and mobilized citizens in the South Delta just returned from a trip to Washington D.C., where they voiced their frustrations with a federal agency's decision to impede the quality of life and economic development in their area.

Several members of the South Delta Flood Control Committee told officials with the United States Environmental Protection Agency that their agency's continued antagonism toward the Yazoo Backwater Pumps "is misguided and harmful to the future of the South Delta Region."

"We have met in good faith with the United States Environmental Protection Agency, other Federal agencies, environmental organizations, and other local and state groups to reach a compromise on this project," said Ruby Johnson of Cary, who is Chairman of the South Delta Flood Control Committee. "We reached a compromise plan which means that the South Delta will take 7 feet more floodwaters and 62,000 acres of woods to satisfy those who call themselves environmentalists. Now, after all these discussions, they want to sneak around and oppose us getting the water off of us."

Members of the local committee told the EPA that there is nothing less sanitary than the constant floodwaters that plague their homes and property.

"It is not healthy for my children and I to walk around our house in knee-deep flood waters," said Anderson Jones of Fidler, a member of the committee. "There sure is nothing healthy for my children to have to walk through polluted water to catch the

school bus, or to fall out of the boat when I am pulling them to the school bus."

"These people talk about wildlife and trees and I can tell you first hand that the floodwaters are no friend to the animals — they leave the woods every time it floods. These floodwaters drive the deer and other animals to the high areas, where cars run over them and coyotes eat them. If these people would just come down here and take a look around the South Delta, they cannot look at the face of flooding and oppose the pumps."

The South Delta Flood Control Committee points out that they are grateful for the support that they have received from their elected officials. Johnson pointed out that Senators Cochran and Lott, Congressman Thompson, and all public officials in our region who have reviewed this issue, are in full support of the Yazoo Backwater Pumping Plant. They remained puzzled, however, by the mis-treatment that they feel they are experiencing from federal agencies such as the EPA and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

"We have sat at the table and given and given to them so that we might get a project that will allow our children and grandchildren to remain in this area and make a living," said Johnson. "We feel that they have not treated us fairly and don't care for our homes and our quality of life. We will fight in our efforts to make sure that the South Delta receives the same treatment that the rest of the United States, surrounding states, and the Mississippi Delta have been given in flood control." - **MSLB**

January 2003 Board meeting recap

Levee Board took the following action: authorized advertisement of bids for Business Auto/ Public Officials & Employees/Liability/Contractors Equipment Insurance, Chemicals, and a Bush Hog; concurred with the permit issued to Twin County for a aerial power line crossing; reviewed bids and awarded Workman's Compensation Insurance to Bill Andrews Insurance Agency, awarded new pick-up truck to England Motor Company, and awarded a new tractor to Ayres Delta Implement; reviewed awards received from the National Waterways Conference for the Public Information Campaign; authorized a delegation to the MVFCA Congressional Meetings March 17-19 in Washington, D.C. to discuss FY 2004 Appropriations; and received status reports on all the ongoing projects in the Levee District. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers attended the meeting to discuss on-going projects and presented the Board the 2002 Outstanding Performance Award for Operation and Maintenance of Flood Control Projects (see photo below). -

MSLB



Col. Rick Clapp, District Engineer of the Vicksburg District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, presents Fred Ballard, President of the Board of Mississippi Levee Commissioners, the 2002 Outstanding Performance Award for Operation and Maintenance of Flood Control Projects at the Board's January 13 meeting. The Board has been awarded this distinction for 44 consecutive years.

Board Member Profile:

Kenny Rogers: Humphreys County



Kenny Rogers, a Belzoni, MS native and Humphreys County Levee Commissioner since 1992, currently serves as the Board's vice-president.

A farmer by profession, Rodgers has lived in Humphreys County all of his life, having taken over the family farm when his father became ill in 1972. Rodgers says that his 10,000 acre farm raises cotton, soybeans and corn.

Rodgers and his wife, Tonya, have three children: Ken, Jr., Brent and Mark. He is an active member of Liberty Baptist Church and also the director of the Boll Weevil Eradication Program for Region 2 in Mississippi. Rodgers also just recently finished serving two terms as President on the Board of Humphreys Academy in Belzoni.

"In 1992, Mr. Drue Lundy, who was then Humphreys County Levee Board Commissioner, got sick," Rodgers says, recalling his becoming involved with the MS Levee Board. "Subsequently, I was appointed to fill the two unexpired years left in his term and was just elected to my third term as a commissioner."

When asked what the most important part of being a Mississippi Levee Board commissioner is, Rodgers replies, "Working for flood control-period. I live and farm in the Yazoo River Basin and I see firsthand how important the job we do is to the citizens of the Delta."

Rodgers says it is critical that the projects the Mississippi Levee Board supports be built, such as the Yazoo Backwater Project. To those who oppose these efforts, he says the following: "They need to come live here for a year. Then those critics would see just how much help this area, and the entire Delta, really needs when the high water comes." - **MSLB**

MS Levee Board Commissioner speaks at DSU

MS Levee Board Commissioner, Nott Wheeler, Jr., one of two commissioners from Bolivar County, was the guest speaker at the "First Tuesday" program held in the Wright Gallery on the Delta State University campus on Tuesday, February 4. His topic for the event was "The Delta's Key Environmental Issue: How We Treat Our Rivers." The Mississippi Levee Board is based in Greenville, MS and has as its' mission the protection of life, land and property in the Levee District.

Wheeler delivered a power point presentation which focused on the mission of the



Commissioner Nott Wheeler, Jr.

Levee Board coupled with an update of the organization's recent projects. Wheeler emphasized the Levee Board's flood control activities and how these affect Delta rivers and tributaries.

Afterward, Wheeler entertained a variety of questions making for a lively and informative end to the program. Joining him during this part of the program was Levee Board Assistant Engineer, Peter Nimrod. Among the topics covered in the question and answer session were an update on the Yazoo Backwater Project, the Big Sunflower River Maintenance Project, Levee Board accountability and funding and the history



Congressman Bennie Thompson South Delta Tour

On December 2, 2002, Congressman Bennie Thompson listens to Scott Baker, Wildlife Biologist for the MS Department of Wildlife, Fisheries & Parks. Mr. Baker compares the benefits of managing water on part of the Mahanna Wildlife Refuge protected by a private levee, and the damage to trees and wildlife on the unprotected area of the Refuge.



EPA/MDEQ South Delta Tour

On December 9, 2002, staff members of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) accompanied the Levee Board and Vicksburg District on a tour of the Yazoo Backwater (YBW) Project and the Big Sunflower River Maintenance Project areas. Above, Kent Parrish, Project Manager for the YBW Project, explains the history and the engineering aspects of the YBW Project.



Haley Barbour South Delta Tour

On December 17, 2002, Haley Barbour, former chairman of the National Republican Party, toured the South Delta. Above, Barbour listens to Clifton Porter as he explains the need for the YBW Project.

The New York Times

There are many tangible benefits to managing water for both wildlife and forestry.

The Yazoo Backwater Project is supported by both public and private owners of large wildlife management areas that would benefit from the reduced flooding that will be provided by this project.

Of 166,550 acres of wetlands in the project area, only 24,500 acres will be affected. The recommended plan will also reforest 62,500 acres in the flood plain, increasing the functional value of these wetlands.

The Mississippi Congressional delegation should be commended for seeing that the people living in the South Delta area of Mississippi are protected from the flood waters originating in 41 percent of the continental United States.

James E. Wanamaker
Chief Engineer, Board of Mississippi Levee Commissioners
From The New York Times, February 12, 2003

Bolivar Co. Northern Drainage District

Quietly and effectively keeping the Northern part of Bolivar County safer

Maintaining the present drainage canals and systems in place is the responsibility of the Bolivar County Northern Drainage District. This particular district is the largest in Bolivar County and is comprised of three commissioners, Pembal Davis, Pat Denton and Edward McKnight.

Drainage districts were organized in Mississippi for the purpose of reclaiming wet, swamp or overflowed lands for agricultural and sanitary purposes. All districts in the Delta consist of a system of artificial main drains, lateral drains, natural drains as well as water courses and levees.

"All of the drainage in the Northern District and other parts of Bolivar County flows down to Washington County and end up in the Sunflower River," Pembal Davis, a 20-year veteran with the District, explains. "So, the work we do here is not just critical for Bolivar County."

Davis notes, though, that without the type of work the Northern Drainage District does, "this whole county would be in serious shape. West Cleveland and Delta State University would be underwater without this maintenance."

Further explaining the role of the District, Davis says, "We don't dig any new ditches. Our job is to maintain those that have been in place for 50 years. We are funded by the revenue generated through the drainage tax on property which is allocated to our Districts and others. This money is then put into a maintenance fund which we use."

Davis is proud of the work that he and his staff is doing. "We have maintained these ditches in Bolivar County in an excellent way," he says. - **MSLB**

Recent letters to the Editor

From *The Clarion-Ledger*

'C-L' wrong to fight Delta pump project

Feb. 18, 2003

As a landowner in Issaquena County, I support the response that the Mississippi Levee Board issued to *The Clarion-Ledger* concerning the Yazoo Backwater Project. I also support the proposed pumping station.

I would like to comment on a statement *The Clarion-Ledger* has used in its articles that 200,000 acres of wetlands would be drained or damaged.

When the south Delta floods, the damage is done by the high water which may linger weeks or months on the land with nowhere to drain. Deer, turkey, bear, wild hogs, rabbits and many other animals must move to higher ground or drown. During the high water period, many animals suffer from lack of food and cover. When the flood water recedes, all browse and cover has been killed.

Only a small amount of land will be used or destroyed —100 acres or so, to build the pumping station.

So, the newspaper's statement of 200,000 acres of land being damaged is far from the truth.

I believe this land will be saved from the harmful effects of the flood waters.

Finally, just how many on the Editorial Board have ever been to the south Delta when the flood waters are there?

I bet not many of them have or they would not be against this flood control project.

David Ham
Hattiesburg

Thompson right on Yazoo pumps

Jan. 8, 2003

I am shocked at your criticism of 2nd District U.S. Rep. Bennie Thompson for his support of the Yazoo Pumps.

Should Rep. Thompson be in favor of moving people out of their homes? Should he be in favor of country people having to put their children in a boat in order to get to the school bus?

We're going to fight to save the south Delta and we appreciate Rep. Thompson's helping us. We are going to fight for the pumps with his help so that those of us who live here can promise our children if they will come back here after they grow up they won't have to worry about being flooded out like us.

Rev. Thomas Parker
Roling Fork

Yazoo Pump should be completed

Jan. 15, 2003

I'm writing in response to your editorial regarding Delta flood control ("Boondoggle: Yazoo Pump is still a bad idea," Dec. 4). As a landowner and farmer whose runoff ends up at the proposed backwater pumps, I, for one, am very happy to see that our congressman has visited, studied, and decided that this is a project that should go forward and be completed.

Too many times I've seen how various groups whose offices were not located in the Delta have decided that they know what is best for those of us who do live and work in the Mississippi Delta. It's about time that those who represent this region stand up for what they have found to be true and right.

These projects that have already been well designed and well studied need to be completed. I would like to see the Editorial Board make the same efforts our congressman has made to get the facts and make intelligent decisions concerning these issues. He should be commended, not ridiculed, for his actions on this decision. I'm sure the Levee Board would love to have the editor and board make a similar fact-finding trip.

Mike Sturdivant, Jr.
Itta Bena

Visit Delta to find flood control facts

Feb. 4, 2003

As recently as 1991, the Mississippi Delta incurred sustained flooding of 1.5 million acres of property, including thousands of residences and businesses. This flooding covered an area equivalent to Hinds, Madison and Rankin Counties and inundated 5 percent of the landmass of Mississippi.

The Delta's elevation falls less than one foot per mile between Memphis and Vicksburg. We live with the realization that extreme flooding devastates humans and wildlife, as well as hope of economic livelihood.

I often wonder if your newspaper's perspective would be different if your staff's homes and businesses were constantly threatened by Delta flooding. Don't worry. Even at maximum flood stage, floodwater in south Delta would have to rise another 200 feet (the height of the Lamar Life building) to approach *The Clarion-Ledger's* office.

Tom Gary, Jr.
Chairman, Flood Control Committee
Delta Council
Greenwood

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON THE YAZOO BACKWATER PROJECT

A series of editorials have been printed over a period of many months critical of the Yazoo Backwater Project, a much needed and federally-authorized flood control project. These editorials have culminated in the most recent attack ("Yazoo Pump Facts Clear, it's a waste of money", The Clarion-Ledger, January 22, 2003). Only a few days later, Mississippi Senators Thad Cochran and Trent Lott both went on the Congressional record endorsing the Project; Congressman Bennie Thompson had endorsed the project in a Clarion-Ledger editorial the week before.

We believe that it is in the best interest of the citizens of the South Delta for whom the Yazoo Backwater Project will benefit enormously—as well as all Mississippi citizens—for the erroneous information being put out regularly by The Clarion-Ledger to be challenged...and corrected. Lives depend on the truth being known. (All editorial comments below are taken directly from the paper's January, 22 editorial)

EDITORIAL: "...[which former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt called a "cuckoozoo" idea]..."

RESPONSE: This comment by Bruce Babbitt is continually trotted out by *The Clarion-Ledger*. We wonder how an Arizona Senator knows more about what's best for the Mississippi South Delta than Mississippi's own Washington delegation. Babbitt is certainly entitled to his own opinion; but he does not live here and, therefore, knows little from where he speaks. Is it "cuckoozoo" to keep a child safe from the terrors of floodwater? Can *The Clarion-Ledger* not find a better criticism than this?

EDITORIAL: "It's made worse by the sneaky way in which it has now been slipped into a spending package before the U.S. Senate."

RESPONSE: "Sneaky"? The U.S. Congress has funded this project each year since FY 1996 and was endorsed on C-SPAN—national television—by Senators Lott and Cochran in a live session aired on January, 23, 2003.

EDITORIAL: "In fact, it won't solve flooding in the South Delta but will only reduce flooding."

RESPONSE: No project is constructed to completely "solve flooding; only an act of God can do that. The project will, however, solve many of the problems that families who inhabit over 1000 homes in the area face during high water events. The Yazoo Backwater Project will lower the 100-year flood plain by 4 to 4.5 feet.

EDITORIAL: "In fact, it will mostly benefit a relative handful of owners of large tracts of land."

RESPONSE: The key word here is "relative." The vast majority of homeowners and citizens of the South Delta are not wealthy landowners; they are working class citizens, many at or just above the poverty level and most of whom are African-American. This Project is by no means a class warfare issue, though *The Clarion-Ledger* seems to want to paint it as such. Preliminary research by the Levee Board indicates that over 600 landowners in the 100-year flood plain in Yazoo County alone will benefit from the Project. This number does not include the five other counties impacted by the 100-year flood.

EDITORIAL: "But what's often overlooked is that some have lived with the flooding there since the 1800's. Others moved there for the low land cost."

RESPONSE: Flooding in this area is affected by water from 41% of the continental United States. Development from other parts of the country in the Mississippi River drainage basin has increased flooding substantially since the 1800's. The South Delta area is now subject to flooding like never before. Moreover, citizens who moved to the South Delta after Congressional authorization of the Project in 1941 assumed they would have that protection of their lives and property in place. They are still waiting.

EDITORIAL: "Should the U.S. Government—as taxpayers—bail them out?"

RESPONSE: Drainage from all or part of 31 states in the U.S., from New York to Montana, comes down the Mississippi River directly impacting the South Delta. Taxpayer-funded projects have been put in place for much less. In 1979, during the great Jackson flood, *The Clarion-Ledger* itself had 20 pumps blown into the downtown area [SOURCE: *The Great Flood*, published by *The Clarion-Ledger/Jackson Daily News*, 1979, Library of Congress #79-88610]. If it's good enough for *The Clarion-Ledger*, isn't it good enough for over 1,000 homeowners and their families in the South Delta?

EDITORIAL: "...figures by Virginia Tech economists Leonard Schabman and Laura Zepp, suggest that it would cost less than the pump to simply, in effect, hand them [South Delta residents] the money."

RESPONSE: Leonard Schabman was on the payroll of the EPA to conduct a study when the figures in question were released, so his objectivity should be called into question. In addition, Schabman and Zepp never stated in their study—the Schabman Report—that money should be handed to area residents in lieu of building the Pump. Besides, all the money in the world could be handed out and such a payout would not negate the fact that roads, schools and churches would still be flooded.

EDITORIAL: "...it is becoming standard procedure to relocate residents rather than for taxpayers to pay repeatedly to repair damages or build costly water control projects."

RESPONSE: Has *The Clarion-Ledger* considered relocating since the '79 Flood? Why should South Delta citizens be relocated from homes they have lived in for generations? Where would they go? What would they do? Those people simply want to see what has been authorized by Congress since 1941—the Yazoo Backwater Project—to be put in place. Ask yourself: Would you want to leave your lifetime home?

EDITORIAL: "It is a waste of taxpayer money that could be better spent on relocating residents, building infrastructure, providing job training and economic incentives for industry to locate."

RESPONSE: You cannot build infrastructure or locate industries into an area that is continually subject to the magnitude of flooding seen in the South Delta. Conversely, in the case of the Pump, build it and industries and businesses will come. The area economy cannot thrive without flood control.

EDITORIAL: "Why aren't our U.S. senators and congressmen taking this approach to better the region rather than trying to funnel hundreds of millions of dollars to a few large landowners and those with political clout in the Delta?"

RESPONSE: Beneficiaries of the Project will be the hardworking, decent South Delta citizens. Additionally, Congressman Bennie Thompson and Senators Thad Cochran and Trent Lott will reap no political benefits from the Project except the satisfaction of finally delivering on a federal promise made long ago to a much-neglected part of this state.

THE CLARION-LEDGER HAS CONSISTENTLY SUPPORTED FEDERALLY FUNDED FLOOD CONTROL PROJECTS FOR THE JACKSON METRO AREA. WHEN WILL THEY SUPPORT FLOOD CONTROL FOR THE DELTA?



For more information, go to www.msleveeboard.com or call 662-334-4813.



Mississippi Levee Board
P.O. Box 637
Greenville, MS 38701
(662) 334-4813
(662) 378-9592 (fax)
www.msleveeboard.com