

Congressman Jerry F. Costello

12th District, Illinois

For Release: Wednesday, April 2, 2008

Contact: David Gillies: 202-225-5661

STERMAN TESTIFIES ON FLOOD MAP ISSUE BEFORE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE

Washington - East-West Gateway Executive Director Les Stermán appeared before the House Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and Emergency Management this morning during a hearing to review the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood plain remapping process. U.S. Congressman Jerry F. Costello (D-IL) invited Stermán to testify about the importance of the National Flood Insurance Program and the bi-state region's experience with remapping.

Stermán stressed the importance of ensuring that levees are sound to protect residents and businesses from the risk of flood. He also emphasized the need to retain Congressman Costello's amendment to H.R. 3121, the Flood Insurance Reform & Modernization Act, which passed the House last September. The Costello amendment seeks to inject equity into the remapping process by stating that FEMA would not be able to adjust premium rates or require the purchase of flood insurance until all remapping has been completed for an entire district of the Corps of Engineers affected by that remapping. Currently, Illinois is scheduled to complete the remapping process several years ahead of Missouri, even though both share the same danger of flooding along the Mississippi River and are in the same Corps of Engineers district.

“Les Stermán has years of experience working on a variety of transportation issues and he has been at the forefront of our efforts to develop a regional plan for dealing with the remapping,” said Costello, a senior member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and former ranking member of the Economic Development Subcommittee. “A main reason we are holding this hearing is that many localities are facing similar problems as they go through this process, and we are trying to provide information that can be helpful nationwide.”

Flood insurance legislation has not yet been considered in the Senate. A final version of the bill can be crafted after Senate passage.

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GRANITE CITY PRESS-RECORD

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Turf battle may rise from levee project

By Chris Coates

The head of a local sanitary district is denying a state bill that would help fund \$180 million in local levee fixes has sparked a turf battle over what government agency will lead the project.

Robert Shipley, executive director of the Metro East Sanitary District, which handles levees and flooding issues for a large section of Madison and St. Clair counties, said legislation that would create an administrative panel for levee fixes does not present issues about what agency is in charge.

"That doesn't bother us," Shipley said. "Not at all."

The new panel is a key component of legislation by state Sen. William R. Haine (D-Alton) that would add a quarter-cent sales tax in Madison, Monroe and St. Clair counties to help pay for levees improvements.

Five levees in the region are at risk of being decertified by the federal government, which has toughened standards for whether the devices will hold up to serious flooding. Property owners in areas with potentially faulty levees are required to have costly flood insurance.

To correct the issues, the counties have formed a 14-member task force charged with coordinating \$180 million in improvements, although St. Louis-based East-West Gateway Council of Governments is handling the administrative functions.

The only funding mechanism currently in place is through the Haine legislation, which would collect and dole out money through the panel comprised of members appointed by the county boards.

The addition of a new panel handling money, however, has stoked fears that the move will amount to a power shift away from the existing drainage districts, many of which made up of political appointees with long track records, oftentimes on county boards. (For example, the most recent appointees to the Metro East Sanitary District - Shipley in October and board member Frank J. Laub earlier this year - are former Madison County Board members picked by board Chairman Alan J. Dunstan.)

Even though the new panel would also be comprised of county board-picked members, the possibility of the counties taking a larger role is a major concern for the existing districts, said Cheryl Day, executive director of Illinois Association of Drainage Districts, a chief opponent of the bill.

She said that while the fixes are needed, the counties should not play a bigger role in funding, which most levee districts handle on their own.

"We are very concerned about the levee repairs and what the plans are regionally," said Day, whose group represents about 1,400 levee and drainage districts. "But our issue is county control."

She said the new rules complicate the fixes because it means another player is involved - one that must approve any projects, regardless of size.

"It could be just the smallest berm," she said Wednesday.

Haine in an interview late last month rejected the idea that the new panel marginalized the existing sanitary districts.

"No. I don't see that," he said. "It's the only opposition I had with this bill."

He said the levee districts and the funding board will have distinct purposes separate from one other: fixing and funding.

"I see it as different missions," he said. "To repair and reconstruct the levees for one. And the other mission of the maintenance of the levees with remain with the levee boards."

Shiple, the Metro East official, agreed that the current plan doesn't change the division of labor.

"That doesn't bother us," he said. "We still got this to maintain."

The state Senate is expected to vote later this month on the bill, which also requires approval from two of the county boards.

Madison and St. Clair county leaders have both pledged support for the plan, although concerns have been raised in Monroe County, which has a levee that doesn't need fixes and wouldn't benefit from the new taxing district.

Madison and St. Clair counties have already set aside \$172,000 each for the design phase of the repair project currently underway.



Posted on Wed, Apr. 09, 2008

Columbia opposes sales tax for levees Council maintains those in flood plain should cover cost

BY BRIAN BRUEGGEMANN
News-Democrat

The Columbia City Council opposes state legislation that would allow a quarter-cent sales tax to be collected in the metro-east to help pay for upgrades to levees along the Mississippi River.

The council voted 5-3 on Monday night to oppose a resolution that would have voiced support for the legislation. Mayor Kevin Hutchinson recommended supporting the legislation, which is pending in the Illinois Senate.

"I had a recommendation that in supporting the region and supporting the economic virility of the area, we should support the rebuilding of the levees, and we should show a regional approach with Madison and St. Clair and Monroe counties," Hutchinson said.

Estimates are that the upgrades, which would prevent the American Bottoms flood plain from being declared a flood-hazard area, will cost \$136 million to \$180 million.

Under legislation being proposed by state Sen. Bill Haine, D-Alton, the counties of Madison, St. Clair and Monroe would each be able to form a flood-prevention district, with approval from the County Board in each county. The districts would be able to collect a quarter-cent, countywide sales tax to pay for levee improvements.

Hutchinson said opponents argued that residences and business in the flood plain should cover the cost, not all consumers in the county. Hutchinson said the affected area in Monroe County contains roughly 20 businesses and 35 homes.

The City Council did, however, approve the contribution of \$12,000 for engineering studies on how the levees in Monroe County can be upgraded. Monroe County will provide another \$12,000 for the study, and the Fish Lake Levee District will provide \$1,000.

Estimates are that levee upgrades in Monroe County will cost more than \$20 million, Hutchinson said.

The American Bottoms flood plain, which runs along the river from Alton to Columbia, is expected to be declared a flood-hazard area due to new federal guidelines on whether a levee can withstand a major flood. The designation would take effect in 2009, unless upgrades to the levees are started.

The levees are high enough to withstand major flooding. The work would include adding or replacing pumps and relief wells to prevent water from seeping under the levees.

The revenue from the sales tax could be used for a bond issue. The tax would end after the work is paid for, or after 25 years, whichever comes first, Haine has said. Local leaders hope to eventually get reimbursement from the federal government for up to 65 percent of the cost of the work.

Contact reporter Brian Brueggemann at bbrueggemann@bnd.com or 692-9481.

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MONROE COUNTY CLARION

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City opposed to county-wide levee tax

By [Joe Leicht](#)

Waterloo doesn't want Illinois Senate Bill 2052 to become law and if it does, city officials don't want the county board to exercise a provision that would allow a quarter-cent sales tax to be imposed without a public vote.

The council unanimously approved a letter composed by Alderman Steve Notheisen and City Attorney Dan Hayes to be sent to the Monroe County Board of Commissioners.

"This has less to do with levee repair and more to do with our commissioners being able to take the authority of the taxpayers and the city council away," Notheisen said at Monday's city council meeting.

At its last April meeting, the city of Columbia voted to opposed the bill.

"I would hope the commissioners would listen to the two major cities in the county," said Notheisen, suggesting the legislation's provision for county officials to impose a tax sets a dangerous precedent.

"I would hate to see a school board with a district in a bind getting to impose a tax without a vote," Notheisen said.

The letter states in part "it is not clear to this council that such a tax increase is in the interest of the citizens of Waterloo. What is clear is that such a tax should only be imposed by a direct vote of the people."

The letter calls the proposed legislation's county-authority provision an "unprecedented usurpation of taxpayer control."

"I can understand the way they're running the government, it's an easy way to get out of a situation by giving the authority to someone else," 3rd Alderman Charles Metzger said.

Notheisen said the proposed tax does not, in his view, put the city at a disadvantage-"It's just that it takes away our authority."

Mayor Tom Smith said the legislation has passed the senate by a comfortable margin and is again before the house.

State Rep. Dan Reitz sponsored the bill, while State Sen. David Luechtefeld voted in favor of it.

Army Corps: Condition of many levees a mystery

By **JIM SALTER** Associated Press Writer

May 12th, 2008 | ST. LOUIS -- Across America, earthen flood levees protect big cities and small towns, wealthy suburbs and rich farmland. But the Army Corps of Engineers, the federal agency that oversees levees, lacks an inventory of thousands of them and has no idea of their condition, the corps' chief levee expert told The Associated Press.

The uncertainty, amid an unusually wet spring that has already caused significant flooding across many states, is creating worry even within the corps.

"We have to get our arms around this issue and understand how many levees there are in the country, who's watching over them, what populations and properties are behind them," Eric Halpin, the corps' special assistant for dam and levee safety, said in an interview last month. "What is the risk posed to the public?"

Critics are troubled that the government doesn't know the answer.

Robert Bea, a University of California at Berkeley levee expert, said many levees are old, with rusting infrastructure and built to protect against relatively common floods — not the big ones like the Great Flood of 1993, when 1,100 levees were broken or had water spill over their tops.

"Once they do get an inventory," Bea said, "I think we're not going to like what we find."

Residents along the Mississippi River have been fighting floods with levees since the 19th century. After a devastating 1927 flood, Congress got involved, approving construction of levees and reservoirs along the Mississippi and Missouri river basins.

Today, about 2,000 levees are either operated by the corps or by local entities in partnership with the corps, generally protecting major population areas such as St. Louis and New Orleans.

Thousands of others — no one is sure how many — are privately owned, operated and maintained. The majority of those are "farm" levees keeping water out of fields, but some protect populated areas, industries and businesses.

For example, flooding in March breached private levees near the southeastern Missouri towns of Dutchtown and Poplar Bluff.

In 2006, prompted in part by the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans the year before, Congress provided funding for the corps to inventory the levees it maintains or helps fund. That initial inventory is complete, Halpin said.

Some of what was found was troubling. For example, corps levees in Missouri and Illinois that are supposed to protect against a 500-year flood fall short of even 100-year protection, said Col. Lewis Setliff III, commander of the corps district in St. Louis. Getting those nine levees up to standard would cost an estimated \$200 million.

Last year, Congress passed the National Levee Safety Act, which for the first time directed the corps to inventory all private levees. But so far, Congress hasn't provided funding and won't likely do so until 2009 at the earliest.

Still, the project is long overdue, said Susan Gilson, executive director of the Washington-based National Association of Flood & Stormwater Management Agencies.

"No. 1, we have to identify all the levees," Gilson said. "We need to identify where there are problems with the levees. Then the next stage will be repairs."

Flooding in March killed nearly two dozen people and damaged or destroyed thousands of homes across a swath of Midwestern states. With the ground saturated and rivers still running high, some worry that more flooding is on the way.

Just across the Mississippi River from St. Louis is the Wood River levee in Illinois, which protects a ConocoPhillips refinery. Flooding there could spell an environmental and economic disaster.

Water seeped through the levee in 1993, but it held. Levee district commissioner Leroy Emerick worries that the next big test might not go as well.

Residents of the tony St. Louis suburb of Chesterfield, Mo., already know what happens if the Monarch Levee breaks.

It happened in 1993, sending the Missouri River surging into the region known as the Chesterfield Valley. Within hours, muddy water reached the rooftop at the popular Annie Gunn's restaurant — seven miles from the river.

In those days, Annie Gunn's was among a few businesses in the valley. Today, the area is home to dozens of big box stores, shopping centers and high-end restaurants.

The development came after the Monarch levee was rebuilt to protect against a 500-year flood, meaning an area has a 1-in-500 chance of being flooded to a certain level in any given year. But David Human, a lawyer for the Monarch district, said there are still small sections of the levee that fall short.

"By fall, we expect 98 percent of the levee system will be at the 500-year level of protection. But guess what? That's not 100 percent," Human said.

Flooding in March nearly wiped out tiny Dutchtown, a community of 99 residents in southeast Missouri. Several waterways — the Castor and Whitewater rivers and Hubble Creek — flow into what's known as the diversion channel there. Torrential rain caused a quick rise in water that tore through a small, private levee.

Weeks after the flood, residents are still ripping out water-soaked carpet and ruined furniture, cleaning debris from their yards, and power-washing mud caked from cars and siding.

"It was so much water at one time, and the levee couldn't handle it," resident Robert Reed, 72, said.

Halpin knows that another major flood would be more than many levees could handle.

"It's not a question of if it will happen. It's a question of when and where it will happen," he said. "There

are a lot of vulnerable spots in this country."

AP Southern Illinois correspondent Jim Suhr contributed to this report.

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Before the flood

Tuesday, May. 27 2008

Metro East businesses and homeowners have been living on borrowed time.

Five levees along the Mississippi River from Alton to Columbia, Ill., are inadequate to protect low-lying communities from what's called a 100-year flood. They have been deficient for years. But this summer, the Federal Emergency Management Agency will release a preliminary updated map naming those areas as a "special flood hazard" — a designation that creates significant economic risk for the region. It is absolutely essential that the designation be modified before the map is finalized in 2009.

Levee repairs won't happen overnight. But the region took a substantial step on the road to protection last week when Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich signed Senate Bill 2052.

The new law, sponsored by state Sen. Bill Haine, D-Alton, was a major priority for area legislators and political leaders. Now it's crucial for the governments of Madison, St. Clair and Monroe counties to establish flood-prevention districts that, with minimal staff and maximum expertise, will assess a quarter-cent sales tax to pay for repairs.

The alternative is to depend on a congressional appropriations process that could take decades to come up with the cash. During that time, designation as a special flood hazard would cost businesses and property owners millions of dollars in extra flood insurance premiums; the cost of flood insurance would jump by 400 percent.

The designation also would limit the ability of existing companies to expand by making it difficult or impossible to finance new construction. And it would prevent new businesses from locating in the region.

Even worse, it could put about 156,000 lives at risk should the unthinkable happen and a major Mississippi River flood occur. That's the number of people who live in areas "protected" by those inadequate levees. Many of them live in poverty. A major flood could produce new versions of the scenes of devastation and suffering that made America cringe in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Fortunately, there's still time to avoid some of the worst consequences. The federal flood map to be released this summer is just a draft; it probably won't be finalized until next year.

In the meantime, Metro East communities have been working to show the federal government that they have a plan in place to repair the levees quickly. That would allow them to keep flood insurance rates down and keep the door open to business expansion.

But a plan won't prevent another major flood from occurring or protect people whose lives would be at risk if it did. Only repairs to the levees can do that. Parts of the Metro East flood-control system date back to the 1930s. River

water is seeping underneath the levees. Old pumps and drainage tiles must be replaced. Making those repairs could cost as much as \$180 million. But 65 percent of the cost eventually could be recovered if Congress appropriates funds to pay for the work — as it should.

Some money already has been set aside for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to do the levee repairs. But the corps has a \$51 billion backlog of authorized projects. In New Orleans, the corps' levee construction and repairs were carried out sporadically because funding came in fits and starts. As a result, even though the risks were well documented, when the hurricane struck, protection was inadequate.

By signing SB 2052, Mr. Blagojevich put Metro East government leaders — who so often have been at the mercy of priorities set by the powerful block of state legislators who represent the Chicago region — in control of their own destiny. That's the best place for them to be if the levees are going to be repaired quickly and effectively.

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Posted on Tue, May. 27, 2008

Monroe County to ask voters whether they support sales tax to fix levees

BY MIKE FITZGERALD
News-Democrat

Monroe County leaders aren't sure whether to impose a quarter-cent sales tax to pay for levee improvements, so they are considering putting the issue before voters in a non-binding referendum Nov. 4.

"That way the voters can weigh in with their opinion on it," said Dale Haudrich, who sits on the three-member County Board of Commissioners.

If the County Board follows through on the referendum idea, then up until the election, "We'd like to explain the pros and cons and benefits of going with this levee improvement as it is today," Haudrich said.

Leaders in St. Clair and Madison counties already have announced plans for the tax, which would exempt food and medicine. Last week, Gov. Rod Blagojevich signed a law allowing each of the three counties to create flood-protection districts that could increase the sales tax by a quarter-cent to pay for levee improvements, estimate to cost \$136 million to \$180 million.

Meanwhile, Monroe County leaders are pondering their next move with the help of a levee task force that has already been appointed.

"We are undecided because there is still a lot of information out there that we don't have to really make a good decision," Commissioner Delbert Wittenauer said. "We really want to do what's best for the citizens of Monroe County."

St. Clair and Madison county leaders also have expressed a desire to team up with Monroe County to coordinate levee improvements and ensure they take place in a uniform, efficient and timely manner.

Haudrich agreed that working with his neighbors to the north makes plenty sense.

"It's a lot more beneficial to go with it now as a collaborative effort versus us having to go at it at a later time by ourselves," he said.

Terry Liefer, the county board's third member, also agreed that regional collaboration is the way to go, but only if such a collaboration reflects the will of voters.

"We definitely want to be good neighbors, but we also have to listen to our citizens," Liefer wrote in an e-mail.

A big factor will be the outcome of a federal lawsuit between the developer of the proposed Columbia Crossing LLC development -- a \$200 million mixed-use commercial project -- and the city of Columbia, Wittenauer said. Planned for 2,000 acres near Interstate 255 and Fish Lake Road near the Jefferson Barracks Bridge, it would include retail, light industrial, distribution, medical, educational and hotel businesses.

As part of the original agreement, developer G.J. Grewe agreed to invest \$20 million on flood levee improvements, with that money repaid in the form of city-sponsored incentives, Wittenauer said.

The outcome of the dispute, which has placed the project in limbo, is "kind of a big issue because if Monroe County needs to protect that area, then it would be for development," he said.

In a lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in East St. Louis last September, Grewe alleged the city failed to live up to a 2004 development contract. It is seeking more than \$2.5 million in lost fees and expenses.

Contact reporter Mike Fitzgerald at mfitzgerald@bnd.com or 239-2533.

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Leaders tout levee efforts

By [STEVE WHITWORTH](#)

June 8, 2008 - 10:38PM

ST. LOUIS - Metro East leaders boasted at an engineers' conference about their efforts to upgrade Mississippi River levees protecting the American Bottom.

"This could never have happened in Missouri," said Les Sterman, executive director of the East-West Gateway Council of Governments, in speaking about the speedy passage of legislation in Illinois that will provide funding for levee improvements.

Sterman and other Metro East officials gave presentations Thursday during the Bi-State Regional Levee Summit, hosted by the East-West Gateway Council.

Sterman reminded attendees that the focus on the Metro East's levees began last August, when the Federal Emergency Management Agency announced that those levees were in danger of losing their certification as providing protection against a so-called base-level flood, also called a 100-year flood, or one that has a 1 percent chance of occurring in any given year. At the same time, FEMA said it would issue new Flood Insurance Risk Maps for the region, which could mean higher flood insurance costs for owners of homes and properties in the American Bottom if the levees' shortcomings were not addressed.

Sterman cited the Illinois General Assembly's passage this year of Senate Bill 2052, sponsored by state Sen. William Haine, D-Alton, which provides a mechanism for three Metro East counties to impose a quarter-cent sales tax in order to raise their share of the some \$180 million needed to bring the levees up to date.

"There were some important decisions, some tough decisions, made in the Illinois portion of the region during the last nine months," Sterman said, calling SB 2052 a "remarkable achievement."

The Levee Summit was the final session of the three-day Midwest Levee Conference, held last week at the Hyatt Regency St. Louis Riverfront Hotel.

Sterman was joined on the dais at the summit by four Illinois leaders: Madison County Board Chairman Alan Dunstan, St. Clair County Board Chairman Mark Kern, Monroe County Board Chairman Dale Haudrich and Jim Pennekamp, chairman of the Leadership Task Force, which has taken on the job of leading the efforts to fund and implement repairs and upgrades to the five levee systems protecting the Metro East from the Mississippi.

Dunstan echoed Sterman's praise for the Metro East's response to the levee crisis.

"This was a bombshell when it hit in August," the Madison County Board chairman said. "We were able to get together and come up with some very good solutions."

Dunstan referred to the process as "crossing the T's and dotting the I's."

In the first category, he noted that U.S. Rep. Jerry Costello, D-Bellefonte, had won passage in

the U.S. House of legislation that would require FEMA to issue the flood maps for both the Illinois and Missouri sides of the river at the same time. Currently, the Illinois maps would come out this week, while the maps showing flood risk on the Missouri side would not come out for two or three years. Metro East officials said that would put them at a disadvantage against their counterparts in Missouri.

Now, the Senate is set to pass Costello's amendment. If it becomes law, "it gives us two to three years to really work on this problem," Dunstan said.

As for crossing the I's, Dunstan said SB 2052 was the other key accomplishment, and he praised Haine and other Southwestern Illinois legislators for working in a bipartisan spirit to get the legislation passed so quickly. Dunstan noted that the Leadership Task Force met last week and issued the declaration of emergency needed to institute the quarter-cent sales tax. The tax will go into effect Jan. 1, and the counties should begin collecting those revenues next March, he said.

The five levee districts involved include the Wood River Drainage and Levee District, and Dunstan noted that it already has raised its residential assessment on the property tax bills of district homeowners by 85 percent. Assessments on commercial property doubled, and industry - largely, the ConocoPhillips Wood River Refinery in Roxana - also is paying more to fund the levee repairs. Out of the \$500,000 in new annual revenue being brought in by the higher assessments, the refinery is contributing \$350,000, Dunstan said.

"Industry is more than willing to be a part of the solution," Pennekamp said. "They just don't want to be the only solution."

Dunstan said the Wood River district would use these new revenues to get a head start on the repairs this year.

"Wood River is ahead of all the other levee districts," he said. "I think the district's levees can be bought up to the 100-year level in two years. We're going to start doing things now."

In the long term, Dunstan said he wants the Wood River levees to be built up enough to withstand a 500-year flood.

Dunstan told conference attendees he hoped the Metro East's efforts would set the blueprint for other parts of the country facing similar levee issues.

"We want to say to the Corps of Engineers, use us as an example," he said. "They're going to want to follow our lead."

Col. Lewis F. Setliff III, district engineer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' St. Louis District, and Otis Williams of the St. Louis Development Corporation, the city's economic development arm, also spoke during the summit.

The conference was hosted by the Society of American Military Engineers (St. Louis Post) and the American Society of Civil Engineers (St. Louis Section), with participation from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' St. Louis District.

The theme of the conference was "Managing Flood Risk Together."

More than 300 levee experts representing a spectrum of interests in the nation's flood protection system infrastructure attended the conference, including participants from architecture and engineering companies, levee districts members and federal, state and local officials.

The conference addressed technology for flood protection design, methodology and operational practices. It also focused on current issues such as Federal Emergency Management Agency map modernization, levee certification and the overall condition of the nation's aging flood protection infrastructure.

The conference's organizers said there has been an increased interest in the nation's flood protection systems since the disastrous levee failures in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Before the conference even began, there were meetings to look at levee deficiencies on both sides of the Mississippi River, as well as on the lower reaches of the Missouri and Illinois rivers.



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06.17.2008 9:01 pm

Wednesday editorial: the flood this time

By: Editorial Board

About 1 o'clock Friday morning, the Mississippi River will reach the highest level ever recorded at Clarksville, Mo. It will keep rising.

For the next two days, the river will go higher than it ever has been. Businesses from First Street to Third Street will be inundated. Levees on an island opposite Clarksville will be overtopped. Farmers and merchants and high school athletes will fill and stack sandbags. The river will continue to swell.

Clarksville's record flood level was set in 1993. That was what bureaucrats and developers confidently call a "500-year flood." Now, 15 years later, the water is even higher; it's heading downstream at a brisk walking pace, flooding one town after another.

If there can be any good news about a flood, it is that, unlike 1993, this time the Missouri River isn't raging, too. Once high water reaches the confluence just above St. Louis, the generally wider Mississippi River channel should absorb it. The bad news is that high water will test aging levees in the Metro East. River levels should peak just a whisker below 40 feet in St. Louis early Saturday morning. Forty feet is a kind of magic number.

At 40 feet, water is under enough pressure to boil under or tear straight through levees from Alton to Columbia. Those aging structures, some built as far back as the 1920s, no longer are certain to protect vast swaths of river bottom in the Metro East, home to tens of thousands of people and billions of dollars in buildings and property.

Levees sometimes fail because water levels rise over them. But more often, as New Orleans learned during Hurricane Katrina, water burrows a tunnel under or through them. That water can overwhelm aging pump stations and undercut the levee's structural integrity, causing it to collapse.

If all goes as forecast — if no rain falls here or upstream between now and Saturday and flood protection on the Mississippi River continues to hold, and if 40 feet is, in fact, the magic number, and not 39 feet — the Metro East will remain relatively dry.

If not?

During the catastrophic flood of 1903 that inundated most of the Metro East, the Mississippi River reached only about 38 feet at St. Louis. That was an exceedingly rare event in those days.

From the time Pierre Laclede helped found St. Louis in 1764 until World War II began in 1941, the river reached 39 feet in St. Louis on only two occasions. Since then, it's reached that height eight times — nine if the forecast for Saturday holds. River height is one figure watched closely by scientists and engineers. It's the figure you hear cited most often, memorialized with high-water marks and used to help determine so-called 100-year and 500-year flood levels.

But another important measure is river flow. That's the volume of water passing by a certain point, expressed in cubic feet per second. Flow is more difficult to measure than height. But it turns out to be more important when you're comparing river levels over time.

Back in 1837, when Robert E. Lee mapped the St. Louis harbor, the Mississippi River was 4,000 feet wide at St. Louis. At that time, the river had exceeded 39 feet only once, in 1785 when it hit 42 feet.

Today, the Mississippi River is slightly more than 1,500 feet wide at St. Louis. Levees have been built along its banks to contain it. Navigational structures such as wing dams and chevrons have been constructed along its channel to concentrate its force.

During that 1903 flood, about 1 million cubic feet of water per second was moving past St. Louis. But the river's height was slightly lower than it's expected to be on Saturday, when the flow will be only about 760,000 cubic feet per second. So what happens next time the Mississippi River bulges with a million cubic feet of water per second? Disaster.

That's the lesson of 1993. And of 1995. It's the lesson of 1973, 1982, 1983 and 1986. Flood-plain development is a bad idea; higher and higher levees upriver only bring higher and higher water levels downriver and upriver, too.

But it is a lesson unlearned. Since the 1993 flood, development has consumed huge amounts of Missouri River flood plain in west St. Louis and St. Charles counties. New malls, industrial parks and even homes are protected by levees that we arrogantly assert are strong enough to withstand a 100- or 500-year flood. Perhaps they are. But cutting off flood plain gives the river less room to expand. That can cause potentially disastrous changes on both the Missouri and Mississippi rivers that are difficult to predict.

The truth is that we don't know how damaging a 500-year flood might be. Even if historical records stretched back that far, the river system has been so thoroughly altered by levees and wing dams that the old records largely are irrelevant. River towns like St. Louis and Chesterfield, St. Peters and tiny Clarksville exist at the confluence of gigantic forces beyond their control.

On one side lies everything we know about engineering and history. On the other is all we don't know about how we've altered the river's topography and natural history.

In between are a tired crew of farmers and merchants and high school athletes, filling and stacking sandbags — hoping that when the flood comes this time, they won't all be washed away.

Clarksville residents battle rising water in 1993. Post-Dispatch file photo.

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Utilities scramble as flooding delays coal supply

*By Christopher S. Rugaber
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
Wednesday, Jun. 18 2008*

WASHINGTON — Extensive flooding in the Midwest has disrupted railroad networks and delayed coal shipments at a time when tight supplies already have contributed to higher prices for coal and electricity.

Union Pacific Corp., the largest U.S. freight railroad, said Tuesday that the floods' effects will reduce its quarterly earnings.

Power producers say the disruptions aren't yet causing shortages of coal supplies because they maintain stockpiles in case of such disruptions. American Electric Power Co. Inc., the nation's largest power producer, has "weeks" of coal reserves on hand, spokeswoman Melissa McHenry said.

Most electric utilities also purchase coal through long-term contracts at prices set well before the floods hit. That will limit the floods' impact on the prices paid by utilities, analysts said.

Meanwhile, several major railroads have either closed lines or are reporting delays of up to three days on shipments of all types of goods. Union Pacific spokesman Donna Kush said three of the six lines knocked out by floodwaters on Friday are still out of service.

The flooding also has affected other industries, rendering more than 300 miles of the Mississippi River inaccessible to freight barges and other commercial traffic. That will slow the shipment of grain, coal, steel and iron, said Mark Parr, a steel industry analyst at Keybanc Capital.

The river closure also will hurt barge operator American Commercial Lines Inc., according to analysts at Stifel Nicolaus & Co., who estimated the delays will wipe out the Jeffersonville, Ind.-based company's expected 10 cent per share second-quarter profit.

Omaha, Neb.-based Union Pacific said "network outages and disruptions" will reduce its second-quarter earnings by about 5 cents per share. That will put Union Pacific's profit toward the lower end of its previous estimates of between 90 cents and 98 cents per share, according to a regulatory filing.

While other goods remain on hold, the railroad is pushing through carloads of coal because it's needed to maintain the nation's power supplies. Energy-related products, including coal and petroleum coke — derived from oil products and used as fuel — make up 20 percent of Union Pacific's total shipments.

Spokesmen for other major North American rails — including Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corp., Canadian Pacific Railway Ltd. and Norfolk Southern Corp. — said they aren't prioritizing any commodity shipments despite delays that remain across the board.

The delays could boost coal prices, which have more than doubled since the

beginning of the year, analysts said.

"It's helping to tighten an already tight market," said Jeremy Sussman, an analyst at investment bank Natixis Bleichroeder Inc.

Futures prices for a ton of central Appalachian coal have jumped from \$56 at the beginning of this year to almost \$116, according to the Energy Information Administration.

The increase is largely due to increased demand from China, India and other developing countries, which has boosted U.S. coal exports. At the same time, domestic coal production has been flat, adding to the upward price pressure.

Railroads are diverting coal shipments away from flooded areas in Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska and Kansas, said Carol Raulston, a spokeswoman for the National Mining Association.

"We are having to reroute many of our train shipments," said John Austerberry, a spokesman for Detroit Edison, which provides electricity to 2.2 million customers in southeastern Michigan.

The company, a unit of DTE Energy Co., is having coal shipped north of the flooded area through Minneapolis and Chicago, Austerberry said. Columbus, Ohio-based AEP's regular coal shipments are detouring south of the flooded areas to its coal terminal in Metropolis, Ill., McHenry said.

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Posted on Wed, Jun. 18, 2008

Mississippi expected to crest Monday in region

BY JENNIFER A. BOWEN
News-Democrat

As the Mississippi River rises and the crest approaches the St. Louis region, roads, ferries and the river itself are being closed.

The river is expected to crest here on Monday, according to the National Weather Service Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Service. The river is not expected to reach 1993 flood levels.

The river was measured at 30.06 feet in Alton on Tuesday afternoon and expected to rise to 33 feet by Monday. The river is considered at a major flood stage when it reaches 34 feet in Alton. It crested there at 42.72 feet in the flood of 1993.

In St. Louis, the river was at 35.77 feet Tuesday afternoon and expected to crest at 39.8 feet Monday. The river is considered at a major flood stage when it reaches 40 feet in St. Louis. It crested at 49.58 feet in the flood of 1993.

The Illinois Department of Transportation is closing roads near the Mississippi River as the water rises and the crest nears the St. Louis area.

Illinois 100, known as the Great River Road, is closed in Grafton at Illinois 3 because water is over the road and flood water has reached Main Street in Grafton.

In St. Clair County, the Martin Luther King Jr. Bridge off Illinois 3 in East St. Louis, the Eads Bridge on Broadway in East St. Louis and the Douglas MacArthur Bridge on 10th Street in East St. Louis are all closed to heavy trucks and subject to complete closure as the water continues to rise, according to IDOT. In Madison County the Venice-McKinley Bridge is closed to heavy trucks.

In Centreville, Illinois 163 east of the Harding Ditch is closed until further notice.

The Brussels Ferry in Jersey County is closed due to high water. The Illinois 3 truck route in Chester is closed between Kaskaskia Street and Illinois 3 until further notice.

The U.S. Coast Guard in St. Louis has closed the Mississippi River to recreational boaters from Iowa to the Jefferson Barracks Bridge until further notice. Debris and swift currents make boating hazardous and wakes from recreational boats could harm levees and sandbags.

However, the river is still open to commercial navigation, according to the Coast Guard.

Near Granite City, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are preparing the levee for the coming crest by moving sand and redirecting water on the east side of the Chain of Rocks Canal Levee. The sand and water redirection is expected to reduce seepage under the levee, according to the Corps.

The Argosy Casino in Alton remains open with a flood bridge installed. The city is sandbagging and installing walls around buildings closest to the river to keep flood water out of low-lying buildings.

The Raging Rivers Waterpark in Grafton remains open despite the flooding. For more information about how to reach the water park while Illinois 100 is closed, call 786-2345.

Contact reporter Jennifer A. Bowen at jbowen@bnd.com or 239-2667.

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Madison County focuses on flood prevention

By **Terry Hillig**

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Thursday, Jun. 19 2008

EDWARDSVILLE — The current flooding along the Mississippi River was fresh in Madison County Board members' minds Wednesday when they voted to create a county flood prevention district, though the timing was purely coincidental.

Acting under authority of state legislation sponsored by Sen. William Haine, D-Alton, the board voted unanimously for the flood prevention district and to approve appointment of three commissioners.

The district will have authority to borrow money and undertake updates and improvements to levee systems that are, in some cases, more than 60 years old. To finance that work, the district can, with County Board consent, issue bonds and levy a temporary quarter-cent sales tax.

Five levee systems in Madison, St. Clair and Monroe counties protect a flood plain that stretches from Alton to Columbia — an area that is home to 156,000 people and 4,000 businesses. The cost of the improvements is estimated at \$180 million.

The levees withstood the record flood of 1993, but that event exposed various problems. The Army Corps of Engineers has warned for several years of a need to replace antiquated and worn-out infrastructure and install additional relief wells to help prevent water from seeping under the levees and causing catastrophic failure.

The worries became urgent for local officials last fall when they learned that the Federal Emergency Management Agency would issue revised flood-risk maps that designate the flood plain as being at risk in a "base flood." There is about a 1 percent chance of such a flood in any given year.

FEMA issued preliminary maps last week.

The redesignation would force many property owners to buy expensive flood insurance and threatens an estimated \$5 billion in potential business investments.

Board member Hal Patton, R-Edwardsville, joined the unanimous vote but called on the board to rely as much as possible on available money, rather than new taxes, to pay for the work.

Board Chairman Alan Dunstan, D-Troy, said the county may be able to get federal and state money for the work but said such aid was uncertain and would be slow in coming in any case.

"You have to get the problem fixed now," Dunstan said.

The commissioners of the new district are J. Thomas Long of Godfrey, Ronald S. Motil of Maryville and James R. Pennekamp of Granite City.



Posted on Thu, Jun. 19, 2008

Dunstan says flooding will be minor in Madison County

The rising waters of the Mississippi River are not expected to cause widespread flooding in Madison County, County Board Chairman Alan J. Dunstan said Thursday.

The Mississippi River is expected to crest Friday at 33 feet -- 12 feet above flood stage but well below the record level of 42.7 feet set in 1993.

"We are seeing some relatively minor flooding in Alton and north along the River Road (Route 100), but unless the situation changes dramatically, damage will be kept to a minimum."

Larry Ringering, coordinator of the Madison County Emergency Management Agency, said the levees that protect thousands of residents and hundreds of businesses from the river are being frequently monitored.

"Representatives of Madison County, the Wood River Levee District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are conducting daily inspections of the levees," Ringering said.

"The levees are structurally sound and there have not been any reported sand boils or undermining of the levees," Ringering continued. "There is no water pressure against the back side of the levees; everything appears to be very stable."

Ringering added that Wood River Creek, although rising, remains at least 13 feet below the bridge on Illinois 3 between East Alton and Alton.

To assist in the flood prevention efforts in Alton, the county's Emergency Management Agency has provided more than 1,500 sand bags to the city of Alton and to the ConAgra grain milling facility on Route 100.

County Board member Tom Hoechst (10th District), said sandbagging has already begun in Alton.

"The Alton Public Works Department is placing sandbags at Williams Street around the downtown commercial district, and we expect flood waters to cover lower portions of Broadway by Friday or Saturday," Hoechst said. "The people of Alton appreciate the support the city is receiving from Madison County."

"Madison County stands ready to provide additional assistance to any area of the county that needs it," Dunstan stated.

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Posted on Thu, Jun. 19, 2008

Madison County creates Flood Protection District to fix levees

The Madison County Board on Wednesday passed a resolution creating a Flood Protection District.

The Flood Protection District has the authority to create a special, quarter-cent sales tax for a period not to exceed 25 years to fund the rehabilitation of the levees.

The board also approved the appointments of Thomas Long, Ronald Motil and James Pennekamp to serve as commissioners of the district.

"Mr. Long, Mr. Motil and Mr. Pennekamp will have administrative responsibilities for the Flood Protection District as we work toward ensuring the levees in Madison County are sufficient to withstand a 500-year flood," said County Board Chairman Alan Dunstan said.

Long is a prominent lawyer and businessman in the Alton/Godfrey area who has been active in the Republican Party, serving as party chairman in Madison County from 1986 to 1991 and as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1988. Mr. Long is a resident of Godfrey and was appointed to a three-year term as commissioner.

Motil is a native of Granite City and currently resides in Maryville. He is a partner in the Glen Carbon law firm of Beatty & Motil and is a former chairman of the Granite City Regional Wastewater Treatment Board. Motil is a member of the Parks and Recreation Committee for the Village of Maryville.

Pennekamp is special assistant to the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Chancellor for Regional Economic development and executive director of the university's research and technology park. Pennekamp previously was executive director of the Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois. Pennekamp is a resident of Granite City.

In May, the Illinois General Assembly enacted the Flood Protection District Act (Public Act 095-0719) permitting Madison, Monroe and St. Clair counties the authority to create a Flood Protection District for the purpose of performing emergency levee repair and flood prevention in order to prevent the loss of life or property.

"Thanks to the efforts of Sen. William Haine and the members of the state legislature from Madison County who worked extremely hard to get this act passed, the county has been given the authority and, importantly, the funding mechanism to address the rehabilitation of the levees that protect the county from the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers," Dunstan said.

"It is appropriate that at a time when we are addressing a rising river and flooding, we are also taking an important step toward protecting our citizens and a very important industrial corridor with creation of the Flood Protection District," Dunstan said.

"Without the establishment of this district and the subsequent rehabilitation of the levees, a substantial portion of the county could have been designated as a flood plain which could have resulted in much higher insurance rates, prohibited future development and the loss of jobs for county residents."

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Posted on Tue, Jun. 24, 2008

Urgency of levee fixes reinforced by flooding

The flooding seen in the past couple of weeks reminds us of the devastation that can be caused by raging rivers.

Our civic, political, labor and business leaders, through a taskforce, have been instrumental in developing plans as well as the need for levee improvement. Their twin goals have been to improve the levees to meet the challenge of threatening flood waters and, second, to avoid the financial cost that decertification of the levees would impose on businesses, farms and residents.

Improvements are needed because the threat of a flood risk without levee improvement will only increase as newer upstream levees put more pressure against our aging system. The levees protect the second largest concentration of population in the Mississippi Corridor, only behind New Orleans.

The Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Emergency Management Agency have identified improvements that need to be made to the system in order to mitigate the risks of levee failure. Among the improvements needed are relief wells to combat underseepage, upgrades in the length of the levee and installation of new infrastructure. Estimates on this construction range from \$136 to \$180 million, which can be put in perspective when considering the \$15 billion cost of flooding in 1993 in the river valley.

A finalized FEMA designation as a flood zone will have dire consequences on the region by requiring property in flood risk areas to have federal flood insurance if it has a mortgage from a federally regulated institution. Additionally, new rates for flood insurance could be expected to rise 400 percent or more.

The governmental resources and organization that was needed for the massive effort to reconstruct, repair and improve our levees were put into place by the recent legislation. This legislation had broad bipartisan and popular support because our citizens recognized the importance and urgency of this effort.

As a result of our efforts, Senate Bill 2052 became the first piece of legislation introduced in 2008 to be signed into law by the governor.

The legislation is a permissive law that allows Madison, Monroe and St. Clair counties to set up flood prevention districts that would have the authority to reconstruct the levees, issue bonds and enact a temporary one-quarter cent sales tax increase on items excluding food, drugs, automobiles and farm equipment.

These districts represent responsible government because they have a singular purpose and will disappear when their work is complete. Madison County recently took the opportunity to create its district.

Additionally, the temporary sales tax they may enact serves as a lifeboat until we can obtain federal reimbursements of up to 65 percent.

Lifeboats, like this sales tax, are designed to be temporary vessels and this funding mechanism will allow us to move forward on desperately needed improvements for the sake of our region's safety and economic vitality. Future federal funds will allow us to retire the bonds, the tax, and the flood prevention district sooner; however, it's clear that we cannot wait on federal funds and must act now.

We have made significant progress and this issue shows that success is possible when people come together across party lines, and at each level of government, to work towards a project which will allow us to avoid disaster and enjoy prosperity for generations to come.

State Sen. Bill Haine of Alton represents the 56th District.

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