

December 16, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Re: St. Johns Bayou and New Madrid Floodway Project

Dear President Obama:

Many of us have written to you in the past calling for an end to the St. Johns Bayou – New Madrid Floodway Project, which jeopardizes the safety and very existence of our communities. We write again to join in the calls to veto this project under section 404(c) of the Clean Water Act to remove the threat that this project poses to our communities once and for all.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers continues to push this \$165 million project that will block the Mississippi River from entering a natural backwater area in the lower New Madrid Floodway with a new 60 foot high levee. The sole purpose of this new levee is to increase development and agricultural use in the Floodway, an area that provides critical flood protection.

If the New Madrid Floodway is not used to divert water during major floods on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, levees and floodwalls would overtop in dozens of river communities in Illinois, Missouri and Kentucky. This would cause untold suffering and devastating losses.

Such flooding would also cause disproportionate harm to the health and safety of minority and low income populations. For example, timely use of the Floodway is critical to the survival of Cairo, Illinois. Census data shows that almost 70 percent of Cairo's residents are Black or African American and almost 33 percent of the city's residents live below the poverty level.

Operating the Floodway is already fraught with opposition and delays. As flood waters were rising in 2011, the state of Missouri sued the Corps of Engineers to stop the Floodway's use. The resulting delay contributed to the flooding of Olive Branch, Illinois, which lost 50 homes and suffered millions of dollars in damage. Any further delay could have completely wiped out Cairo. Once the Floodway was used, water levels at Cairo dropped 2.7 feet in just 48 hours.

The St. Johns Bayou – New Madrid Floodway project will put our communities at even greater risk of catastrophic flooding by creating more obstacles and opposition to the Floodway's use. We are at a loss to understand how the Corps of Engineers could determine that this is in the national interest. We certainly know that it is not in the interest of our communities.

Sincerely,

Illinois

Tyrone Coleman, Mayor
Cairo, IL

Gary Forby, Illinois State Senator
59th District

Rita K. Flummer, Mayor
City of Mounds, IL

Brandon W. Phelps, Illinois State Representative
118th District

Elbert Purchase, Councilmember
Cairo, IL

Richard Pitcher, Councilmember
Cairo, IL

Constance Williams, Councilmember
Cairo, IL

Philip Hodges, Councilmember
Cairo, IL

Thomas M. Simpson, Councilmember
Cairo, IL

Lorenzo Nelson, Councilmember
Cairo, IL

Monica Smith, President
Chamber of Commerce, Cairo, IL

Harold McNelly, Chairman
Board of Commissioners, Alexander County, IL

Monte Russell, Chairman
Board of Commissioners, Pulaski County, IL

Michael Caldwell, Former Chairman
Board of Commissioners, Alexander County, IL

Richard Grisby, President
Alexander/Pulaski Branch NAACP #3025, Cairo, IL

Ed Dorsey, President
Carbondale Branch NAACP #3002, Carbondale, IL

David Willis, Chairman
Len Small Drainage and Levee District, Olive
Branch, IL

Missouri

Jolie Justus, Minority Leader
Missouri State Senate

Scott Burnett, Chairman
Jackson County Missouri Legislature, 1st District

Crystal Williams, Jackson County Missouri
Legislator, 2nd District At-Large

Dennis R. Waits, Jackson County Missouri
Legislator, 3rd District

Theresa Garza Ruiz, Jackson County Missouri
Legislator, 1st District At-Large

Matthew Mallinson, Mayor
Sugar Creek, Missouri

Sue Frank, Former Mayor
Raytown, Missouri

Kentucky

J.W. Cleary, President
Paducah NAACP Unit #3108, Paducah, KY

Greg Terry, County Judge Executive
Carlisle County, KY