



UPFRONT

May 9, 2011

Title: Man vs. The River

The media has been full of news concerning the floods on the Mississippi south of St. Louis. This flood level will be at 48 feet projected at Memphis sometime today. This is the highest level the river has been since 1927 when the flood literally inundated Memphis, TN. Water reached into downtown Memphis and wreaked havoc, just as the flood waters did in Cedar Rapids in 2008, which caused billions of dollars in damage.

We all have followed the torrential rains that have fallen in the Ohio River Valley and the tornados and violent storms that crossed Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi, and moved on into the southeastern United States. Some areas received over 600 percent of the average rainfall for the month of April. The Mississippi, already well above flood stage here in the upper Midwest, was suddenly confronted with a major flood on the Ohio, and Cairo, IL, a community of 3,600 was put at risk. The decision was made to blow the levee on the Missouri side above Cairo to relieve the pressure on its protective levee.

The breaching of the Missouri levee suddenly put 200,000 acres of farmland and homes under water. The question I heard at my coffees was, why weren't the farmers upset by the action of the Corps of Engineers? One never read of any opposition to what the Corps proposed.

I called Vicki Stoller of Burlington, IA, who is on the Executive Board for the Upper Mississippi, Illinois, and Missouri Rivers Association (UMIMRA). She talked to me

about the history of the Mississippi River Tributary Project (MRPT). After the record flood of 1927, the Federal Government created the MRPT and built a levee system that covered the Mississippi and its' tributaries south of St Louis. Work was begun in 1928, and work continues on an annual basis to this day. The Federal Government has had an annual appropriation every year since the project's inception. Currently, congress is providing \$300 million dollars a year toward repair, upkeep and new projects.

The levee system is massive when compared to our levee systems of UMIMRA. They are made of dirt and, in some instances, highways are on top of the levees. Their pumping stations are huge when compared to the pumping stations in our area. The feds are paying a subsidy to operate those pumping stations, while our Iowa River Flint Creek District 16 drainage area receives nothing. Vicki told me that the southern representatives in Congress are much stronger on river issues than their fellow congressmen to the north. It seems as if the northern representatives are hesitant because of environmentalists' concerns. Environmentalist groups in the upper Mississippi actually want to eliminate the levees and allow the river to flow naturally. There is constant tension amongst the affected parties as agricultural interests feel that rivers transportation and its effect on the moving of crops to international markets would be severely hampered.

The section of the levee that was blown is known as the New Madrid Flowage. It was created in 1937, and an agreement was reached by the landowners behind the levee that their land could be subject to providing levee relief. Dynamite tubes were built into the levee to accommodate explosives if they were needed. This last week was the first time the flood plan was used. Farmers in the area were paid a one-time easement payment in 1937. Landowners have had no protection since, and many of the landowners are different than those of 70 years ago. It is my understanding that Congressmen and Senators representing those southern states are working on a method to compensate those farmers who are affected by this action by the Corps of Engineers. Allowing them to be eligible for Federal Crop Insurance is one of the proposed solutions.

What will be the condition of the land once the waters have receded back into the Mississippi? "It all depends" is the answer I got from Vicki Stoller, as she spoke of the effects of the breaching of the levee above Burlington. The Iowa River Flint Creek District 16, created a hole in the levee and then cut another hole in the

southeast corner of the drainage district so that the water could drain away more easily. She reports that a lot of the silt settled and actually made the land more fertile. Other areas experienced large deposits of sand that had to be removed. For the most part, crops were good the next year.

Iowa River Flint Creek District 16 in Louisa County is going through a certification process with FEMA. The process must identify that the land in the district, because of its levee system, will have 100 year protection. Cost of this certification process has required the district to issue \$3 million dollars in bonds. Certification will be completed by this October. Certification is necessary so that residents and farmers will not be subject to high insurance rates. However, because of the locations of some property, those could still be identified as high risk

Man has always been in constant conflict with nature as he has works to improve his environment. Man was not here first, nature was. The forces of nature are powerful and many times cannot be controlled. The farmers of the New Madrid Flowage were told to give up their crops and income for this year, and perhaps the next----- all this to save the city of Cairo, Illinois.

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If you have any issues or concerns, please contact me. Be sure to include your name and address with any communication to my office.

State Rep. Dave Heaton, R-Mount Pleasant, represents the 91st House District, which includes all of Henry County and the northern half of Lee County.
