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June 8, 2020

Colonel Robert A. Hilliard  
Commander  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Vicksburg District  
ATTN: CEMVK-PPMD  
4155 East Clay Street, Room 248  
Vicksburg, MS 39183

Re: Notice of Intent Published April 16, 2020, 85 F.R. 21218

Dear Colonel Hilliard,

I commend the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for declaring its Notice of Intent (NOI) to develop a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for the Yazoo Basin Reformulation Study, Yazoo Backwater Area, 58 FR 103 (October 6, 1993). This SEIS would incorporate new, previously unavailable data and analyze a new project proposal to build the Yazoo Area Pump Project Feature. Repeated, damaging backwater floods over the past decade have harmed the people, economy, and environment of the South Mississippi Delta. I encourage USACE, as well as its agency partners such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), to advance this proposal to provide long overdue flood control for the Mississippi Delta.

The Yazoo Backwater Area is a major drainage basin of 4,093 square miles, totaling approximately 2.62 million acres. The natural process is for rainwater from the basin to enter the Mississippi River, but the Yazoo Backwater Levee, completed in 1978 to prevent Mississippi River floodwaters from entering the basin, prevents water from leaving the area. Without pumps during times of high water, the water cannot flow into the river as a tributary source should. With this feature, the citizens of the Yazoo Backwater Area would be afforded the same certainties that are provided to residents living in similar backwater areas along the Mississippi River.

Last year, Yazoo Backwater flooding set troubling records. When the flood reached 98.2 feet, over 548,000 acres of the region were underwater, including 231,000 acres of farmland. An estimated 686 homes were flooded. Three highways were overtopped for months. Tragically, two people died. The need for these pumps has been made clear once again by flooding this year, which has inundated half a million acres in the South Delta. Farmers are facing delays for planting crops, roads remain underwater, and residents again face considerable hardship. The lack of a pumping feature is devastating to the region's residents. The Yazoo Backwater residents are resilient and have endured great difficulties to preserve their way of life and to live in their homes.

The stories of courage and heroism in the face of the backwater flooding are inspiring, but these are preventable tragedies.

The incomplete flood control structure also has tremendous economic consequences. Tens of thousands of acres of cropland are taken out of productive use each flood season. The crop insurance payouts demonstrate how expensive this is to the federal government. A pumping feature would have paid for itself many times over by preventing these damages. Insurance payments do not provide a full remedy, but a completed flood control project could transform the region. Additionally, the lack of protection from flooding has contributed to the prevalence of poverty in the area. As USACE notes in the SEIS, this project could create economic opportunity for residents by reducing the recurrent economic damages.

Finally, the new project proposal would provide significant environmental benefits. As designed, the feature would turn on at 87 feet, an elevation that leaves over 200,000 acres in wetland conditions. If USACE completes this project, these wetlands would be retained and even improved. Long periods of stagnant backwater conditions are known to be detrimental to wetland health. Furthermore, new data strongly suggests that these wetlands are sustained by the ample rain the region receives, not by backwater flooding. Instead, backwater flooding causes environmental damages to aquatic species, wildlife, and trees. For these reasons, this project enjoys the support of environmental interests that know the region best, including the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, the Mississippi Forestry Commission, the Mississippi Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, and thousands of residents in the Mississippi Delta.

In the wake of the historic flood of 1927, the United States Congress made the people of Mississippi a promise. After the water receded, the legislative branch took action to protect areas along the Mississippi River from future overflows, passing the Flood Control Act of 1928 and eventually authorizing the Yazoo Backwater Project. These measures told area residents that, when future rains came, those living above a certain elevation would be protected. It is time to fulfill this promise by completing the project.

I strongly support this SEIS and the new project proposal that will provide long-lasting benefits to the people, economy, and environment of the South Mississippi Delta.

Sincerely,



Roger F. Wicker  
U.S. Senator