



Officials Sign Partnership Agreement to Complete Reconstruction of Wood River Levee System

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WOOD RIVER — Officials signed a partnership agreement Friday morning with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers to complete reconstruction of the Wood River Levee System.

Army Col. Bryan K. Sizemore, commander of the St. Louis District, along with Ron Carnell, president of the Wood River Drainage and Levee District and Chuck Etwert, chief supervisor of construction for the Southwestern Illinois Flood Prevention District, signed the agreement to allow all three agencies to partner on the construction of the supplemental design deficiency corrections.

Hal Graef, project manager with the Corps, said the Wood River Levee System's limited reevaluation report redefines the levee project until completion.

"We have 146 wells from now until completion to do," Graef said. "We have four new pump stations and two pump station modifications. We also have a master plan from now to completion."

Graef said there is a lot of work that's happened during the past 24 months.

"In another couple of years this place will be rock solid with much better protection that it has right now," he said.

As engineering standards evolved the original levee system, designed and built in the 1940s by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, became deficient. In 2007, the Federal Emergency Management Agency declared the system did not meet safety requirements and threatened to decertify the levees.

Illinois lawmakers spearheaded an effort to reconstruct the levee system, plus found a way to pay for it by creating the Southwestern Illinois Flood Protection District. The district collects a quarter-cent sales tax and oversees the reconstruction of the levees from Alton to Columbia.

County Board Chairman Kurt Prenzler attended the signing, which was held at the Wood River Drainage and Levee District office, and said it's good to see the project continuing to move forward.

"Decertification would have prevented investment in the area," Prenzler said. "The designation would have caused flood insurance rates for individuals and businesses to soar."

He said the goal was to get to the 100-year flood stage and receive FEMA accreditation, which the federal agency is currently reviewing.

"We reached the 100-year mark and now we are waiting on FEMA certification," he said. "With this year's flood you can see the levees performed as designed. They did their job in keeping the public safe."

