



Construction Now Underway on Majority of Planned Levee Improvement Projects

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EDWARDSVILLE, ILL., MAY 13, 2014 . . . The St. Louis Metro East Levee Issues Alliance, a regional coalition that supports the residents and businesses in the American Bottom whose lives and livelihoods depend on the timely completion of the Metro East levee improvements, is celebrating the ramping up of work to make that goal a reality. Several projects are currently underway, coming in under budget and estimated to be completed on schedule within the timeframe required for completion of the improvements and reaccreditation by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) sometime in 2015.

A total of six separate projects are currently underway, and now that the weather has improved, approximately \$3 million per month is being spent on construction of the levee improvements that will ensure the levee system continues to safeguard the homes and businesses of the 156,000 residents and 55,000 workers that lie behind it in the American Bottom.

“Things are going great overall and we remain confident that all of the work will be completed in 2015,” said Chuck Etwert, Chief Supervisor for the Flood Prevention District (FPD) Council.

As the comprehensive project moves through this more active construction phase, the Levee Issues Alliance, which is administered by the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois, is reinforcing that timely completion of the project remains a top priority for the region.

“A recent study reveals that the total direct and indirect annual regional impact of the levee-protected Illinois Route 3 Corridor tops \$20 billion in annual business revenue, supporting more than 215,000 total jobs with an annual payroll of \$9.2 billion,” stated

Ellen Krohne, executive director of the Leadership Council. “It is essential to the future of our entire region that our levees continue to protect the nearly 60-mile long, five-mile wide economic corridor in the American Bottom that connects businesses and consumers from north of Alton to south of Waterloo and has the potential for significant future growth as logistics and distribution industries continue to invest here.”

The construction underway is putting local people to work as the projects have been awarded to a variety of contractors based in Southwestern Illinois or with operations in other parts of the state. Among the contractors working on the projects are Korte and Luitjohan Contractors of Highland, Keller Construction of Glen Carbon, Haier Plumbing of Okawville and Lane Construction of Shorewood, Ill., which has several local firms as subcontractors on its team.

Projects are underway on several of the individual levee systems, including: Metro East Sanitary District (MESD), where four new pump stations are being installed and other work involves clay capping, earth fill, piping, a relief well, sluice gate rehabilitation and more; Prairie Du Pont and Fish Lake Levees, both of which are also getting a new pump station, clay cap, seepage berms, piping and sluice gate rehab work; and Wood River Levee, where work is underway on a new pump station, seepage wells, earth fill, piping and more.

Individual projects will begin wrapping up as early as this month, with the rest on track for completion at varying stages over the next several months. Two other projects to build cut off walls for the Wood River levee are pending review and approval from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Due to continuing collaboration between the USACE and the FPD Council, those are expected soon, and the project should be out to bid later this year so that work can be completed in 2015.

“Despite some delays earlier in the process, it appears the majority of the work will be completed as planned in 2014, and we’re optimistic the remainder will be wrapped up on schedule early enough in 2015 so that all of the levees can be reaccruited before any new flood maps are released by FEMA for our region,” noted Rich Conner, Chairman of the Levee Issues Alliance. “That’s good news.”

A working group of the LIA and representatives from Senators Durbin and Kirk and Congressmen Enyart, Shimkus and Davis has been meeting regularly with representatives of the FPD Council and the USACE to facilitate the ongoing dialogue between the two and gather the information necessary to fulfill its role as the watchdog for the project. The LIA is committed to ensuring re-accreditation of the levees by FEMA in order to eliminate the future threat of much more costly insurance requirements for residents who can least afford them and for the business operating here or considering a location in the American Bottom.

“We trust the Flood Prevention District Council will continue to do everything necessary to keep this project moving forward and on schedule, and thanks to the leadership and decisive action by our three County Board Chairmen early in this process, they have resources required to get the job done,” noted Conner.

Photo 1: Work continues on a shoring system for the intake valve on one of several pump stations being installed along the levees within the Metro East Levee System.



Photo 2: Workers set a manhole that's part of a conveyance system for the Metro East Sanitary District Levee.



Photo 3 : Earth fill is being placed along the north face of the Fish Lake Levee, where work is set to wrap up on the next few weeks.



The St. Louis Metro East Levee Issues Alliance serves as the organizational framework for the regional, public/private effort to help prevent the unintended economic consequences produced by FEMA's update of the flood insurance rate maps in our region. The Alliance's coalition of business and civic organizations, community leaders and concerned citizens is currently working to help ensure the timely completion of the levee improvements so they meet new federal standards and continue to protect the lives and livelihoods in the American Bottom, which is home to 156,000 residents and 55,000 existing jobs. Learn more at www.stlmetroeastlevees.org.

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