

RECORD OF DECISION

Mississippi River – Gulf Outlet, New Lock and Connecting Channels, Louisiana

I have reviewed the Main Report and Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Mississippi River – Gulf Outlet, New Lock and Connecting Channels (Evaluation Report and EIS), Louisiana, filed with the Environmental Protection Agency on February 11, 1998, as well as correspondence received in response to coordination of these documents. I find the plan recommended by the District Engineer, New Orleans District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to be economically justified, in accordance with environmental statutes, and in the public interest. Thus, I approve that plan for construction.

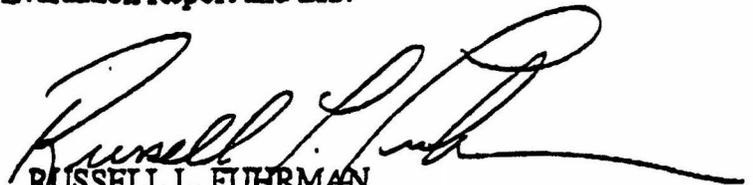
The project was authorized by Chapter 112 of the River and Harbors and Flood Control Act of 1956, Section 186 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1976, Section 844 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986, and Section 326 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996. The Evaluation Study and EIS evaluated various alternatives to replace the obsolete Inner Harbor Navigation Canal Lock in order to improve navigation between the Mississippi River in the vicinity of New Orleans, Louisiana, the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, and the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet. The proposed plan recommended by the District Engineer and approved, as modified by the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works), consists of the following features:

- Construction of a new lock 110 feet wide, 1,200 feet long, and 36 feet deep. This would include demolition of the existing lock and construction of two temporary navigation bypass channels.
- Replacement of the St. Claude Avenue bridge. This would include demolition of the existing bridge and construction of a temporary bypass bridge at St. Claude Avenue.
- Modification of the Claiborne Avenue bridge.
- Extension of the Mississippi River flood protection levees and floodwalls approximately 2,500 feet along the canal to the new lock.
- Implementation of a community impact mitigation plan.
- Implementation of a fish and wildlife mitigation plan to fully compensate for unavoidable project impacts to the natural environment.

In addition to a "no action" alternative, seven alternative sites were developed and evaluated. Eight alternative plans were developed and evaluated for the site of the existing lock. These plans included various combinations of alignments, construction methods, and bridge replacement scenarios. The various alternative sites and plans are described and discussed in the Evaluation Report and EIS and are hereby incorporated by reference. The Evaluation Report and EIS identifies the Bridge Only Plan, which consists of replacing the existing, low-level St. Claude Avenue bridge with a mid-level span, as the environmentally preferable plan since it does not adversely impact fish and wildlife habitats. However, the Bridge Only plan would not solve the navigation problems, would not be compatible with any future lock replacement, and would have negative impacts on vehicular traffic patterns in the local community both during and after project construction. This plan was not chosen because it does not provide a long-term solution to the navigation problems. The alternative with a navigation lock 110-feet wide by 900-feet long by 22-feet deep has the greatest net National Economic Development benefits over costs without unacceptable environmental impacts. The Port of New Orleans requested a lock with the same width but longer (1200 feet long) and deeper (36 feet deep). Since this alternative had negligibly greater environmental and social impacts and because the Port of New Orleans agreed to pay the increased costs, this alternative was selected and recommended.

I have reviewed and evaluated all documents concerning the New Orleans District Engineer's recommendation, views of other interested agencies and the general public, prevailing administrative policies and environmental policies, and the various practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the construction and operation of the project.

All practicable means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental effects have been incorporated into the recommended plan. The public interest will be best served by implementing the improvements identified and described in the Evaluation Report and EIS.


RUSSELL L. FUHRMAN
Major General, USA
Director of Civil Works

12/16/98
DATE