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Water released for test at Davis Pond diversion

NEW ORLEANS—The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers today began a test diversion at the Davis Pond Freshwater Diversion Project, about 16 miles upstream of New Orleans on the west bank of the Mississippi River near Luling.

The purpose of the test is to ascertain the maximum diversions that can be maintained, verify the maximum water elevations expected in the ponding area during large scale diversions and check on the ability of the guide levees in the lower portion of the ponding area to contain these high flows.

The diverted river water will pass through the gated structure, on into the ponding area south of US 90, and then into Lake Cataouatche. The test began with diverting the maximum flow that river stages will allow, up to the structure's design maximum flow of 10,650 cubic feet per second (4.8 million gallons per minute).

Officials will undertake other monitoring activities, such as calibrating flow and velocity gages currently operated by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and stage and marsh elevation gages installed by the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The Corps, USGS and DNR will take part in the monitoring during the testing period. Water stages, marsh elevation, water quality, and the path of the plume from the ponding area to Lake Cataouatche and on into Lake Salvador will be among the parameters monitored.

Once testing is completed later this week, it is possible that diversions will continue if salinities in the Barataria Basin are above the desired levels for this time of year. Presently, salinities in the Barataria Basin are above the desired levels, so no adverse effects from these tests are anticipated.

Since Davis Pond became operational in August 2002, the need for large scale diversions has been minimal due to the low salinity levels in the Barataria Basin. Over the past year, prolonged large scale diversions, such as those needed for testing, could have over-freshened the basin and adversely impacted the productivity of some species.