



State of Louisiana
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
OFFICE OF COASTAL MANAGEMENT

October 7, 2015

Colonel Richard L. Hansen
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Colonel Hansen:

During and after the extended high-water event on the Atchafalaya and Mississippi Rivers in 2015, the Atchafalaya Basin Program (ABP) received a large number of complaints about the enormous input of sediment into the swamp through the Coon Trap weir on the main channel of the Atchafalaya River.

At the urging of a Louisiana State legislator, ABP staff recently accompanied several stakeholders on a visit of the areas affected by this sediment. We observed Grand Lake, Bee Bayou, Keelboat Pass, Lake Chicot, and Flat Lake Pass, which have all been heavily impacted by sediment being transported from the main channel of the Atchafalaya River into the northwest sections of the Flat Lake / East Grand Lake Water Management Unit.

Observing the degree of these impacts firsthand was eye-opening. Additionally, stakeholders related their observations of what has occurred in the relatively short time Coon Trap has been open. They pointed out and described the previous water/land boundaries and water depths that have been negatively affected by this direct input from the river. It is my understanding that the Coon Trap weir was originally proposed as a closure, but that the weir was built as a compromise to allow access at higher river stages. However, at high water, crossing this weir is extremely dangerous due to the shear velocity of the water over the rocks. This same velocity at high water stages is allowing vast amounts of sediment to fill in the waterways and swamp.

Following our field visit we noted, by comparing historic aerial photos that the weir has narrowed in its east-west dimension due to erosion, and in the most recent photographs, is nearly breached. Comparing historic Google Earth imagery from the past 15 years, it is apparent that the weir width has been eroded and that the weir is possibly subsiding. (Please referenced attached photos)

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Based on what we observed both in the field visit and on the aerial photos, the ABP communicated with the ABP Technical Advisory Group (TAG) scientists, requesting their input. The TAG agreed unanimously that Coon Trap should be fully closed by building the height of the weir to the level of the existing natural land elevation at the river. The TAG did recommend that monitoring be conducted after the closure to determine if additional water input would be needed. The TAG agreed that, if additional water input is necessary, it could be provided from Bayou Sorrel through one or more features of the ABP East Grand Lake Project.

The ABP solicited comments during a two week period from the general public, and received 25 responses, all in favor of fully closing Coon Trap. As you know, it is rare when a great majority of stakeholders agree on an issue in the Basin. Comments were received from hunters, commercial fishermen, recreational users, land owners, scientists, and concerned citizens.

Based on field observations, the TAG recommendation, and public support, I respectfully request that the Corps fully close Coon Trap by elevating its height to the level of the existing land elevation at the river. Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please contact me at your convenience if you have any questions or would like to discuss this issue.

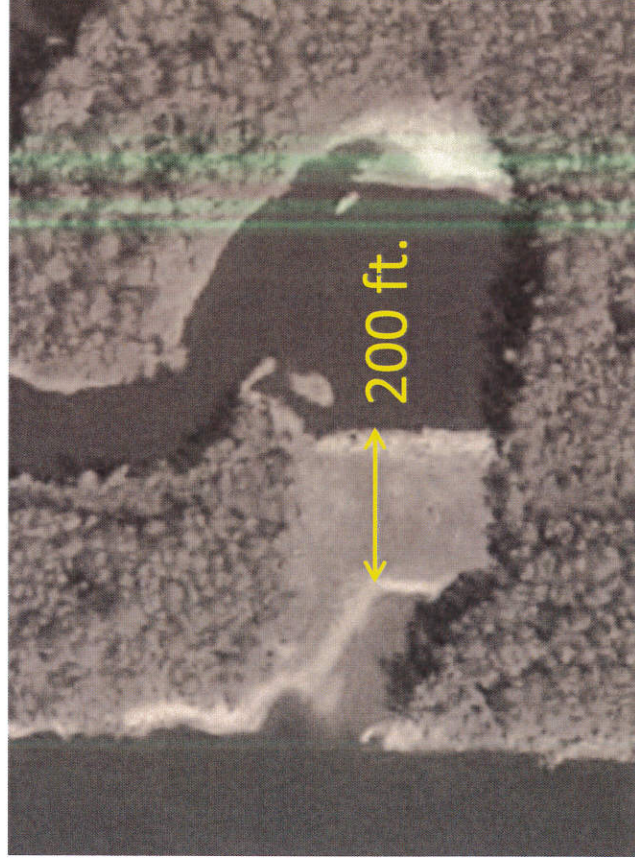
Sincerely,



Don Haydel, Director
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Attachment

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