

Economist Says St. Johns-New Madrid Levee Project Is Unjustified

A proposed U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flood control project along the Mississippi River in southern Missouri is not economically justified, according to a farm economist.

Tom Stinson, a professor of economics at the University of Minnesota, testified before Missouri state officials last week

that the Corps did not properly calculate the cost-benefit ratio of the \$85 million St. Johns Bayou–New Madrid Floodway project near Mississippi River Mile 890.

The Corps' Mississippi Valley Division issued a Record of Decision in late August, approving the final environmental impact statement and authorizing the commencement of construction. However, the project still needs a clean water permit prior to beginning the construction.

Two environmental groups, alleging that the project will eliminate significant wetland habitat, objected to the state's issuance of a clean water permit. That objection resulted in the initiation of the public hearing.

Under a cost-sharing agreement, local stakeholders in the East Prairie, Mo., area are required to provide 25 percent of the funding for the project. Another reason the project isn't justified is that those stakeholders have not yet produced the necessary funding, Stinson said.

Officials from the Corps and Missouri Department of Natural Resources will respond to criticism of the project when the hearing continues in January. A final recommendation on whether or not to issue a clean water permit is expected following the January testimony.

The purpose of the project is to alleviate frequent agricultural and residential flooding in the East Prairie and Pinhook, Mo., area.