

**DRAFT**  
**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**WESTOVER BENDWAY WEIRS**  
**PHILLIPS COUNTY, ARKANSAS**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Memphis District, intends to construct five bendway weirs along the right bank of the Mississippi River at Westover, between miles 651R and 652R in Phillips County, Arkansas. The project site is approximately 13 miles south-southwest of Helena, Arkansas, and 13 miles northwest of Clarksdale, Mississippi. Specific location puts it just downstream of the New Helena Harbor, Arkansas and across the river from Friars Point, Mississippi. The harbor is also known as the Phillips County Harbor. This particular river reach was not originally covered under the 1976 *Mississippi River and Tributaries, Mississippi River Levees and Channel Improvement Environmental Impact Statement*. Therefore, this EA is prepared to address the impacts of installing five small bendway weirs in this river reach.

This reach of the Mississippi River requires constant dredging to maintain a safe navigation channel because of a large sand bar that has developed across the river just downstream of Mississippi Limestone, a major gravel industry on this part of the river. The growth of the sand bar has narrowed the navigation channel causing swift currents to pull towboats toward the right bank. This makes it extremely difficult and hazardous for the towboats to safely navigate this river bend from either direction. At low river stages, both Helena Harbor and Mississippi Limestone facilities are inaccessible due to exposed sand bars. The swift river currents have also scoured the river bottom at the base of the existing revetment. This could cause the revetted bank to fail with significant riverbank erosion. If this happens, access to Helena Harbor could possibly be blocked. More importantly, the main Mississippi River Levee is only several hundred feet back from the river along this reach. Loss of revetment protection and subsequent fast bank erosion could lead to a massive levee failure at high river stages.

No river bank excavation would be done. There would be no top bank channel enlargement. All work would be done from floating barges. The work would involve placing approximately 43,000 tons of graded stone A at the base of the revetted bank and extending outward along the river bottom. The stone would be large limestone rock obtained from quarries near Cape Girardeau, Missouri, or Paducah, Kentucky. Weir dimensions would be from 500 feet to 750 feet long and 50 feet wide at the bases. The tops of the weirs would be 25 feet or more below the low water reference plane to ensure safe towboat navigation, even at the lowest river stages.

The bendway weirs would direct the swift currents away from the river bank, reduce the strong side currents, widen and move the navigation channel away from the river bank, and provide for safer towboat passage through this reach. Access to Helena Harbor, just upstream, and Mississippi Limestone, just upstream across the river would be maintained. Maintenance dredging just upstream of the project site would be reduced. Erosion of the revetted river bank would be reduced and the bank reinforced by the underwater weirs. This would help to prevent a massive river bank failure and possible Mississippi River Levee failure.

An environmental assessment (EA) was prepared to address potential impacts of this work on endangered species, wetlands, prime and unique farmland, cultural resources, aquatic resources, wildlife resources, and the human environment. No wetlands are involved, as all work would be done completely within the Mississippi River channel. This project meets the criteria of Nationwide Permit 13 for bank stabilization; no Section 404(b)(1) evaluation is required. No

significant changes in water quality are expected during and after large limestone rock is placed in the river.

Coordination with the Natural Resource Conservation Service was not required since all work would be done in the river. No cropland, prime or unique farmland, or farmed wetlands would be excavated or disturbed. Memphis District Environmental Branch biologists visited the site and did not find threatened or endangered species, or critical habitats, in the immediate project area. A small portion of the sand bar across the river would be slowly removed with channel widening. It was determined this would not adversely impact the endangered interior least tern, the pallid sturgeon or the fat pocketbook mussel. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with our findings. Endangered species requirements have been fulfilled. No evidence of hazardous, toxic, or radioactive waste (HTRW) was found within the project area during the site visit; and a review of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency records also did not indicate the presence of HTRW.

There would be no adverse terrestrial wildlife impacts. No significant direct adverse impacts to aquatic resources are expected. After construction, the aquatic habitat is expected to improve with the change in substrate diversity provided by the rock and different river current patterns among the weirs.

This project would not result in adverse impacts to cultural resources because of the nature of the work and because no excavation would be done. No further cultural work would be required for this project unless the scope of work or project rights-of-way change. Cultural resources requirements have been fulfilled. This project has been coordinated with the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). A copy of the draft EA and Public Notice has been sent to the SHPO.

Installing the bendway weirs would involve several barges and small towboats working along the right river bank; much less than what is required for new revetment construction. The equipment required for bendway weir construction would work close to the bank and not pose a significant navigation hazard. The contractor will have a contact pilot on the job at all times to manage towboat traffic and improve communication with industry. The Coast Guard will be coordinated with during all phases of construction to ensure continued river navigation safety. They will alert all towboat traffic to be aware of this construction activity. No adverse impacts are expected. After construction, a wider and safer navigation channel is expected in this hazardous river reach. Navigation safety would be greatly improved. Section 10 Navigation requirements have been fulfilled.

As the environmental documentation for this proposed project does not indicate this to be a major federal action significantly affecting the human environment, I have determined that an environmental impact statement is not required.

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Date

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Thomas P. Smith  
Colonel, Corps of Engineers  
District Commander