



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers** ®  
Memphis District

**ISSUE DATE:** April 21, 2008

**EXPIRATION DATE:** May 21, 2008

**NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY**

**Draft ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
and  
Draft FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)**

**U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, MEMPHIS DISTRICT**

**REPLY TO:**

**ATTN: John Rumancik**

**Environmental Branch (CEMVM-PM-E)**

**U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS**

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Memphis, Tennessee 38103-1894

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**TITLE:** Westover Bendway Weirs, Phillips County, Arkansas, Under Water Rock Dike Weirs, River Mile 652R.

**AUTHORITY:** This project is authorized by Flood Control Act of 15 May 1928, Public Law No. 391-70, as amended by subsequent Acts of Congress. As part of this Act, the Federal government is responsible for major maintenance of the constructed flood control and navigation features.

**LOCATION:** The Westover Bendway Weirs project is located in southeast Arkansas on the right descending bank of the Mississippi River between miles 651R and 652R in Phillips County. 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 (also known as the Phillips County Harbor), and across the river from Friars Point, Mississippi. The harbor is also known as the Phillips County Harbor. The project location is found on the Friars Point, NW, 1:24,000 Quadrangle map (Figure 1) and the enclosed aerial photograph (Figure 2).

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:** Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 as amended, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Memphis District is issuing this notice to update

environmental coordination on the authorized project. The Corps of Engineers is responsible for maintaining safe navigation on the Mississippi River. 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.

**PURPOSE:** The primary purpose of this project is to create a safer navigation channel for towboats in the Mississippi River bend around Mile 652R by reducing the strong drafting current that presently exists. A secondary purpose is to redirect the river currents to maintain access to Helena Harbor on the right bank, and the Mississippi Limestone docks on left bank. This would help maintain the economy of the area. The third purpose is to help reduce the dredging problem that exists at this location. The fourth purpose is to prevent erosion of the existing revetment along this river reach. Failure to protect the revetment could lead to the nearby Mississippi River Levee failing at high river stages resulting in massive property damage and possible loss of life.

**ALTERNATIVES:** Five alternatives were considered during plan formulation.

*Alternative 1: No Action:* The no-action alternative is defined as termination of this bendway weir project. The unsafe navigation conditions through this river bend would continue to worsen. Erosion of the river bed at the bank toe would increase, leading to bank failure. This would create a pocket along the outside bank producing very unsafe eddies that would compound the already unsafe navigation conditions. This could cause a towboat accident. Failure of the revetted river bank so close to the main Mississippi River Levee could possibly lead to the levee failing at high river flood stages. This would be a catastrophic disaster. Silting in of the Helena Harbor mouth and the Mississippi Limestone dock would produce economic hardships to those businesses and to the overall area. Losses of revenue would occur.

*Alternative 2: Increase Dredging In This River Reach:* Increasing dredging along this river reach to maintain safe navigation would be costly. The river is moving toward the right descending river bank. The growing sand bar on the left bank is constricting the navigation channel against the revetted right descending bank. The amount of sand that would be required to be removed from this huge, 1.5 mile long bar could not be done in sufficient time to stabilize the channel prior to the next high river stage. The sand bar would be expected to redevelop soon after dredging ceases thus negating the huge dredging effort and expense. The industrial facilities on both sides of the river would receive no relief. Also, the river bank would still undergo erosion that could threaten the integrity of the nearby Mississippi River levee.

*Alternative 3: Install High Dikes Along the Outside Bank:* High Dikes would rise above the water surface and extend far out into the navigation channel in this tight bend. They would efficiently direct the river currents away from the right bank but would force the towboats to slowly navigate past them. This would be nearly impossible to do in swift river currents along the outside bend. At low and intermediate river stages, the dikes would create a very narrow navigation channel through this bend. This would be very hazardous to navigation. A towboat accident could occur. The Mississippi Limestone dock on the left bank would probably be accessible for longer periods because dikes would direct low river stage currents toward the left river bank, helping it to be free of sand bar development. However, a high dike immediately downstream of the Helena Harbor mouth would eddy the currents and encourage a sand bar to develop there. This would adversely impact boats transiting the harbor mouth. Also, high dikes so near the harbor mouth would make for major navigation hazards at the mouth. On the other hand, this alternative would provide increased protection along the revetted bank and stronger protection of the Mississippi River levee. High dikes on the right descending river bank would only solve a portion of the problems in this river reach.

*Alternative 4: Install Hard Points:* Hard points are very short dikes spaced at close intervals along an eroding river bank. They would stabilize the river bank in a similar fashion as the high dikes would. They would be much shorter in length than regular dikes and be less of a navigation hazard than long dikes would be. However, there would still be unsafe towboat passage through this reach because of maneuvering required to avoid the structures. A wider river channel is required at this river reach for safe towboat navigation. Hard points would be too short to direct low river stage currents toward the left bank to remove the edge of the sand bar that is encroaching into the navigation channel. The navigation channel would still remain narrow with swift and unsafe currents. Both industrial facilities would see no relief from their problems, and sand bar formation at both places would still be a problem. However, as with dikes, increased river bank protection would also increase the levee protection.

*Alternative 5: Install Five Under Water Bendway Weirs:* Bendway weirs would redirect the swift currents and navigation sailing line off the river bank. This would make for safer towboat transit of this river bend. The weirs would be 25 feet and more underneath the towboats so there would be no navigation hazards around this bend or at the mouth of Helena Harbor. The weirs would eventually remove a small part of the edge of the sand bar that is encroaching from across the river. This would widen the channel and reduce the erosive currents along the toe of the revetted river bank. Both navigation channel and river currents would be modified sufficiently such that dredging problems would be reduced in this river reach. The revetment along the river bank would be strengthened and stabilized with additional rock, thus protecting the nearby Mississippi River levee. Some of the low river sand bar that is exposed at Mississippi Limestone would be reduced permitting the docks to be used for a longer period of the year. In addition, installing under water weirs would be less costly than building long, high dikes, and continued annual dredging.

Consequently, Alternative 5, installing five under water bendway weirs along the right Mississippi River bank at Mile 652R is the only feasible alternative.

**WETLANDS AND WATER QUALITY:** This project would be constructed entirely under water without any river bank excavation. Thus, no wetlands would be impacted. This project meets the criteria of Nationwide Permit 13 for bank stabilization. No Section 404(b)(1) evaluation is required. Since this project is for navigation safety in the Mississippi River, and is similar to a normal dike construction project, no special permit is required from the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality.

**ENDANGERED SPECIES:** This project was reviewed and thoroughly discussed with the USFWS and both the Arkansas and Mississippi wildlife resource agencies at the February 21, 2007 and the February 26, 2008 Interagency Environmental Meetings. All agencies agreed there would be no adverse impacts to any endangered species. The USFWS granted endangered species clearance at the 2007 meeting. Their follow-up clearance letter is included in the Appendix to this document. At the 2008 meeting, the USFWS reaffirmed their previous findings of no adverse impact to any endangered species or critical habitat. This project is being coordinated again with the UFWS through the draft environmental assessment. Any additional comments they may have regarding general impacts to wildlife and endangered or threatened wildlife or plants, or their critical habitats, will be considered in our final environmental assessment.

**CULTURAL RESOURCES:** The Memphis District archaeologist reviewed this project and the construction plans. It was determined that no adverse cultural resources impacts would result from construction due to the nature of the work and the fact that no excavation would occur. This project has been coordinated with the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). A copy of the draft EA and Public Notice will be sent to the SHPO.

**Section 10 Navigation:** Installing the bendway weirs would involve several barges and small towboats working along the right river bank, much less equipment than what is required for new revetment construction. The equipment required for bendway weir construction would be working close to the bank and would 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 smoother navigation channel is expected in this hazardous river reach. Navigation safety would be greatly improved following project completion.

**PUBLIC INTEREST REVIEW:** The purpose of this public notice is to advise all interested parties of the proposed activity, and to solicit comments and information necessary to evaluate the probable impact on the public interest. This notice is being circulated to Federal, State and local environmental agencies, the towing industry, and other businesses along the river.

The decision to construct this project will be based on an evaluation of the probable impact, including cumulative impacts, of the activity on the public interest. That decision will reflect the national concern for both protection and utilization of important resources. The potential benefits of the activity must be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. The potential direct, indirect and cumulative affects of the activity on the human environment will be considered including: economics, aesthetics, general environmental navigation, shoreline erosion and accretion, recreation, water supply and conservation, water quality, energy needs, safety, food and fiber production, mineral needs, considerations of property ownership and, in general, the needs and welfare of the people.

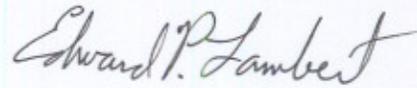
The Corps of Engineers is soliciting comments from the public; Federal, state, and local agencies and officials; the towing industry; Indian Tribes; and other interested parties in order to consider and evaluate the impacts of the proposed activity. Any comments received will be considered by the Corps of Engineers to determine whether to proceed with the proposed action. To make this decision, comments are used to assess impacts on endangered species, historic properties, water quality, general environmental effects, and the other public interest factors. Comments are used in preparation of the final environmental assessment pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. **The draft environmental assessment has been completed and will be circulated to agencies and any other party that responds to this notice requesting a copy. A copy has been placed on the District's website at:**

**<http://www.mvm.usace.army.mil/regulatory/public-notices/pn.htm>**

**PUBLIC HEARING:** Any person may request, in writing, within the comment period specified in this notice, that a public hearing be held to consider this proposed project. Requests for a public hearing shall clearly state the reason for holding a public hearing. The District Engineer will determine if the issues raised are substantial and whether a hearing is needed in order to reach a decision on the project. Failure of any agency or individual to comment on this notice will be interpreted to mean that there is no objection to the proposed work.

**COMMENTS OR REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** If you wish to obtain additional information or to submit comments on this proposal, please contact John Rumancik at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Branch (PM-E), 167 North Main Street RM B-202, Memphis, Tennessee 38103-1894, at 901/544-3975. **Comments should be forwarded to this office by May 21, 2008.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edward P. Lambert". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "E".

Edward P. Lambert  
Chief, Environmental Branch

Enclosures

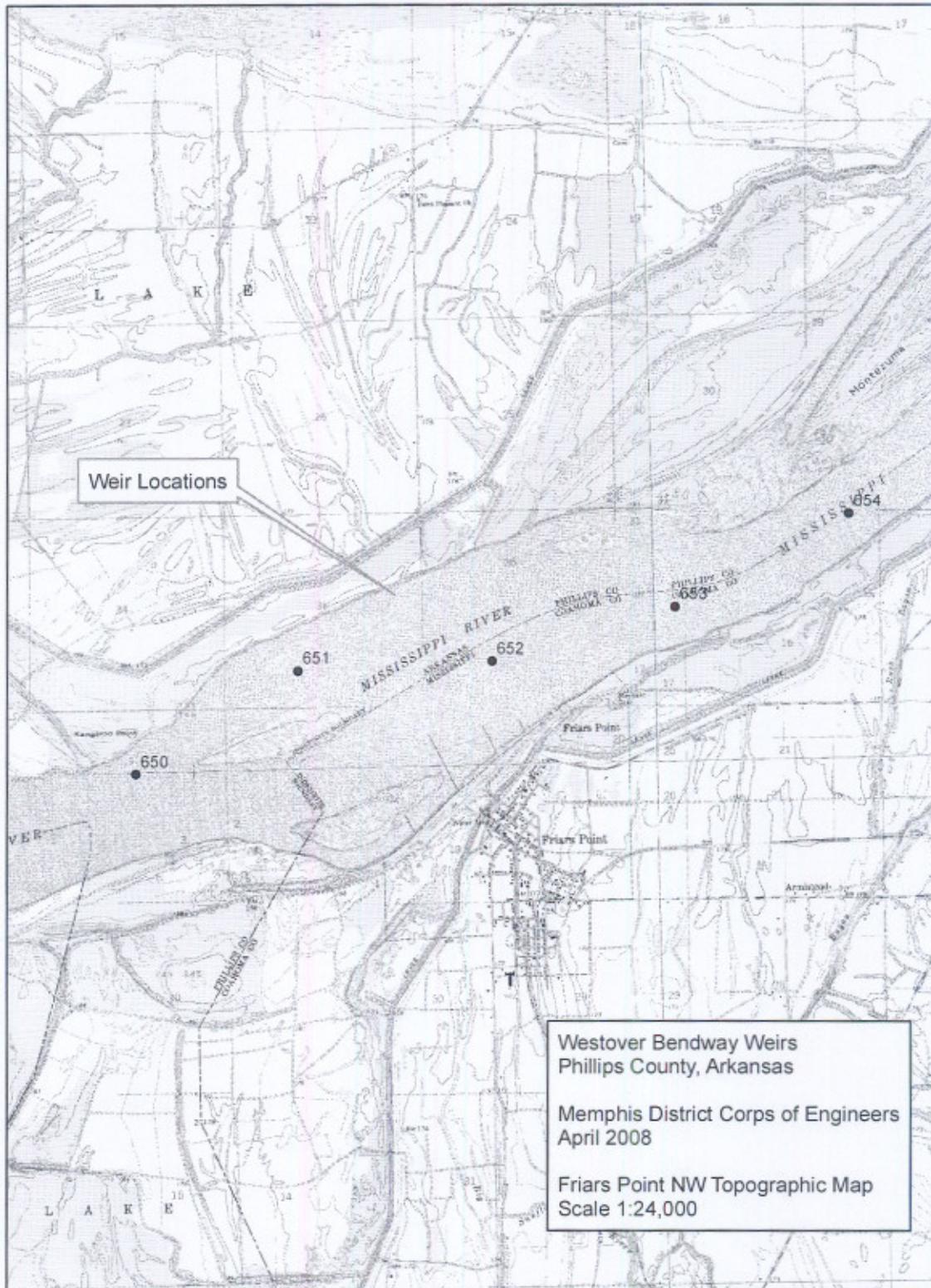


Figure 1



# 2008 WESTOVER BENDWAY WEIR CONSTRUCTION

