

Flood project helps wildlife, expert testifies

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JEFFERSON CITY - An Army Corps of Engineers fish expert testified Wednesday that a flood control project in the Missouri Bootheel will help wildlife.

Jack Killgore, who was hired by the corps to measure the project's environmental impact, said the planned 8,375 acres of reforested cropland is "more than adequate" to compensate for lost habitats. Killgore said his calculation was based on a formula that determines the average number of acres flooded in the project area on any given day.

Environmental group attorneys said the corps did not properly apply the formula. They said since each individual acre is flooded on average every third day, the estimation should be tripled. At least 24,000 total replacement acres will be needed to compensate for the effects of the project, they said.

In all, about 75,000 acres in the Bootheel near East Prairie, Mo., will be affected if the \$85 billion plan to plug the 1,500-foot gap is approved. The gap allows water to enter the floodway, which is said to be one of the last remaining connections between the river and its floodplain in the lower Mississippi valley.

Killgore's testimony came on the third day of hearings before a Clean Water Commission officer who is reviewing the state's issuance of a permit approving the project.

Environmentalists have challenged the permit, saying it is a waste of money that will not solve flooding problems but will eliminate wetlands that support fish, waterfowl and water filtration.

Killgore testified that reforested areas provide greater ecological value than flooded croplands. He said even though there will be a net loss of flooded acreage, fish and other wildlife will actually benefit.

The corps has determined that 28,000 acres within the area of the flood control project are the most important to fish. These acres flood at least once every two years.

Another environmental group concern is that there is no requirement for the corps to purchase replacement land within this area. But Killgore said the corps' discretion in choosing appropriate land is essential. He said there might be valuable land outside this area.

Proponents say the Department of Natural Resources can revoke the permit at any time if the corps is not complying.