Letter

September 3, 2003

Dear Ms. Anderson:

The science of engineering has always been at the heart of regional development. It plays a critical role in flood control, navigation, recreation and environmental stewardship — all of which improve our society. Today, a new approach is emerging to better complement the science of engineering — collaborative communication.

Collaborative communication is a better way when it comes to sustainable water resources development that benefits humankind without harming the environment. It calls for us first to understand, then seek complementary engineering solutions to old problems. Cooperation, mutual respect, and listening by all parties are the keys to making it work.

A recent example of this approach occurred with the St. Johns Bayou-New Madrid Floodway Project. The project has been a source of contentious debate for several decades, as southeastern Missouri residents who suffer from frequent flooding went head-to-head with environmental groups opposed to flood control because of the potential loss of wetlands.

However, close coordination with the partners, intense listening between stakeholders on all sides of the issue, an active communication effort to enhance understanding on both sides of the project, and a willingness to be flexible and explore new methods for protecting and enhancing the environment are paying off for everyone. Working together, we have developed a project that strikes a balance between economic development and natural systems. In the words of management author Stephen Covey, it is a "synergistic solution." Gaining trust through open communications, mutual respect and careful coordination lies at the heart of relationship building and future progress.

Sincerely,

Jack V. Scherer
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
Memphis District Engineer