



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

ISSUE DATE: December 20, 2018

EXPIRATION DATE: January 19, 2019

JOINT PUBLIC NOTICE

**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Memphis District**

**Availability of draft Environmental Assessment, draft Finding of No Significant Impacts,
and draft Section 404(b)(1) Evaluation**

TITLE: Mississippi River Mainline Levee, Rena Lara and Trotters Seepage Control Measures, Coahoma and Tunica counties, Mississippi.

JOINT PUBLIC NOTICE: This public notice is issued jointly with the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ). The MDEQ will use the comments to this notice in deciding whether to grant Section 401 water quality certification.

AUTHORITY: The project is authorized as part of the Flood Control Act of 1928, as amended.

LOCATION: The proposed seepage control measures are located along the Mississippi River Mainline Levee (MRL), located near the towns of Rena Lara, in Coahoma County, and Trotter's Landing, in Tunica County, Mississippi (Figure 1).

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Memphis District (MVM), is issuing this notice of the proposed installation of seepage control measures along the Mississippi River mainline levee located near the towns of Rena Lara, Mississippi and Trotter's Landing, Mississippi.

PURPOSE: Seepage that occurs during flood conditions on the Mississippi River needs to be controlled in order to ensure that the levee system does not fail during a project flood event. Seepage could undermine the levee causing it to breach if unabated and flood the surrounding lands and residential areas. A levee breach would threaten the lives and property of residents within the flooded areas.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION: The proposed project would involve constructing an earthen berm adjacent to the landside levee slope, installing 10 relief wells, modification of existing drainage systems, rehabilitation or removal of existing water berms, placement of rip-rap to prevent potential scour, and clearing vegetation from existing ditches. The location of each proposed action is presented in Figures 2 and 3. Access to the project areas would be from Eubanks, Dundee, and Levee Roads. Specialized drill rigs would be used to drill the holes along the levee, and cranes would be used to install the relief wells. A bulldozer and excavator would be used to remove/rehabilitate the seepage berms and to modify the existing ditch.

Compensatory mitigation for unavoidable impacts associated with the proposed action would consist of restoring approximately 34.92 acres of cleared agricultural lands to bottomland hardwood forest as described in draft Environmental Assessment.

At the Rena Lara site (Figure 2), the existing ditch proposed to be re-shaped, receive fill to provide back pressure to prevent sand boils, and have rip-rap placed to prevent scour occupies approximately 1.13 acres of wetlands dominated by black willow, cottonwood, smartweed and cocklebur. The location proposed for relief well placement is a wetland area currently used as a water berm and is dominated by early successional species such as black willow and cottonwood. The location of the proposed access road adjacent to the ditch and the spoil area for excess material are currently planted in pasture grass and subjected to routine mowing and/or cattle grazing. Compensatory mitigation for these impacts is addressed in the Mitigation Section below.

At the Trotters site (Figure 3), the proposed relief wells and seepage berm would be located on land planted in pasture grass and subjected to routine mowing and/or cattle grazing. Fill material would be obtained from approximately 29.3 acres of an abandoned levee riverside of the current MRL. This elevated upland bottomland hardwood area primarily consists of eastern cottonwood, sycamore, sugarberry, persimmon, and green ash in the overstory and vines and herbaceous species such as grapes and greenbrier in the understory. Compensatory mitigation for these impacts is addressed in the Mitigation Section below.

Alternatives Considered

Two alternatives were considered: Alternative 1 (No-Action); and Alternative 2 (Construct a Landside Berm and Install Relief Wells with Associated Drainage Work).

1) No Action: In the future without project condition (no-action), the proposed action would not be constructed. The no-action alternative would result in continued seepage during flood conditions. Sands and silts would be carried under the levee, potentially causing sand boils. This could eventually lead to levee failure during a major flood event. Failure of the levee could result in property damage, human injuries and/or loss of life.

2) Construct a Landside Berm and Install Relief Wells with Associated Drainage Work: This alternative consists of constructing a berm along the landside toe of the MRL and removal of the existing water berm at the Trotters project area, installing 10 relief wells (four at the Rena Lara project area and six at the Trotters project area), modifying existing drainage systems, placement of rip-rap to prevent potential scour, and vegetation removal from the existing ditch and reshaping the existing water berm at the Rena Lara project area. However, it is anticipated that these actions would result in approximately 1.2 acres of wetlands being cleared and filled at the Rena Lara project area (1.13 acres associated with ditch modifications and 0.06 acres for relief wells) and approximately 29.3 acres of non-wet bottomland hardwoods being cleared at the borrow location at the Trotters project area.

After careful consideration of the alternatives, it was determined that alternative 1 (no-action) was unacceptable because of risks to human life and property. If seepage problems are not addressed, levee failure resulting in catastrophic impacts could ultimately result. All factors considered, alternative 2 is the most practical solution for seepage control and is the preferred alternative for the proposed project.

MITIGATION: Mitigation requirements would consist of planting 34.92 acres in bottomland hardwood species and restoring hydrology, if applicable, within tracts of cleared agricultural land. However, impacts for the MRL program within Mississippi are currently below original estimates described in the 1998 final Supplemental EIS (SEIS), *Mississippi River Mainline Levees Enlargement and Seepage Control*. Therefore, required mitigation, considering the anticipated impacts of the proposed project, is 121 acres (504 functional capacity units) less than the expected amount for MRL construction projects to date. Thus, environmental impacts resulting from the recommended alternative are addressed through the ongoing mitigation plan for Mississippi River Levees and Seepage projects.

WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION: Impacts to water quality within the Mississippi River would be minimal or have no effect, as the river normally carries a heavy sediment load. Thus, no significant impacts to water quality would occur as a result of the proposed project. A Section 404(b)(1) Evaluation was prepared for the proposed project action and is included as an attachment in the associated draft EA. A state water quality certification is requested from the State of Mississippi, Department of Environmental Quality, with this draft EA.

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES: In the summer of 2018, USACE biologists conducted a site assessment of the Rena Lara and Trotters project areas. Vegetation proposed to be cleared and potential impact areas were examined for the presence of suitable/potential habitat for the northern long-eared bat (NLEB) as well as the presence of pondberry. Pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, as amended, USACE has determined that the tree clearing required for the proposed project may affect, but is not likely to affect the NLEB or the wood stork. Furthermore, based on location of the project and surveys of the project area, USACE has determined that the proposed project would have no effect on the fat pocketbook, pallid sturgeon, least tern, or pondberry. Additionally, no evidence of bald eagles, or their nests, were observed at any project location.

CULTURAL RESOURCES: A literature review and cultural resources survey within the project's Area-of-Potential-Effect (APE) were completed in the summer of 2018. The investigation revealed two previously identified significant cultural resources within the Trotters APE. Both sites were discovered in 2003 during a survey for seepage control work in the area and have been determined ineligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). No significant cultural resources were identified within the Rena Lara project's APE. Therefore, there would be no historic properties affected as a result of the proposed project.

PUBLIC INTEREST REVIEW: The purpose of this public notice is to advise all interested parties of the proposed activities 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 decision to proceed with the proposed modifications 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. Potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the activity on the human environment will be considered.

The USACE is soliciting comments from the public, federal, state, and local agencies and officials; Indian Tribes; and other interested parties to consider and evaluate the impacts of the proposed activity. Any comments received will be considered by MVM 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 other public interest factors. Comments are also used in preparation of the final EA pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act and to determine the overall public interest of the proposed activity. The draft Environmental Assessment, draft Finding of No Significant Impact, and draft Section 404(b)(1) Evaluation have 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/About/Offices/Regulatory/Public-Notices/>.

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 action. Requests for a public hearing should 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 to reach a decision on the project. Should any agency or individual decline comment on this notice, it will be interpreted by MVM to mean that there is no objection to the proposed work.

COMMENTS OR REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Send comments to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Memphis District, and MDEQ. Comments may be sent via mail or email to the following:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Memphis District
ATTN: Joshua Koontz
167 North Main St., Room B-202
Memphis, TN 38103-1894
e-mail: joshua.m.koontz@usace.army.mil
phone: (901)544-3975

MDEQ
Office of Pollution Control
P.O. Box 2261
Jackson, MS 39225-2261

Comments must be received by the expiration date listed on page one of this notice.

Sincerely,



Edward P. Lambert
Chief, Environmental Compliance Branch,
Regional Planning and Environmental Division South

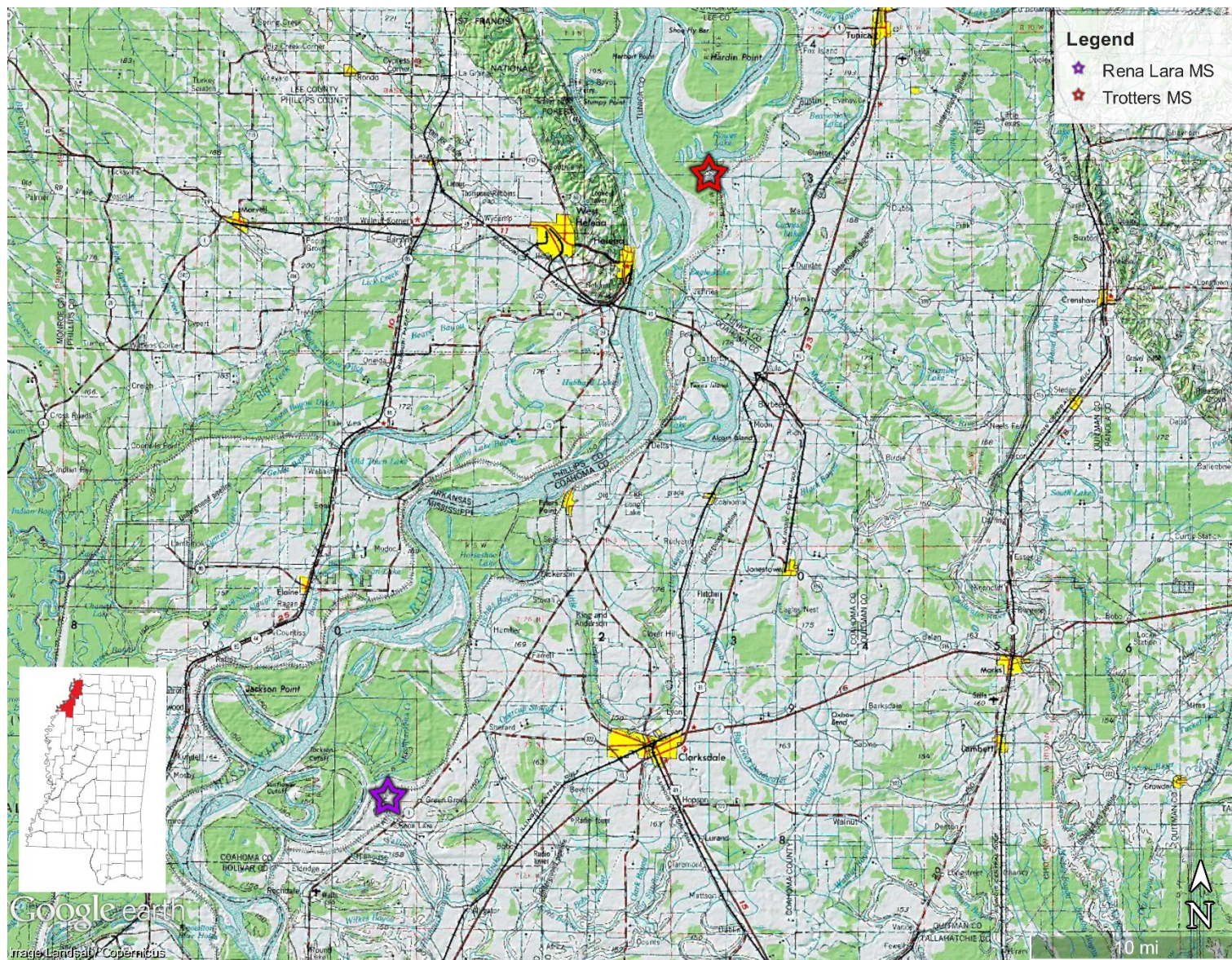


Figure 1. Location of proposed seepage control measures along the Mississippi River mainline levee, Coahoma and Tunica counties, Mississippi.

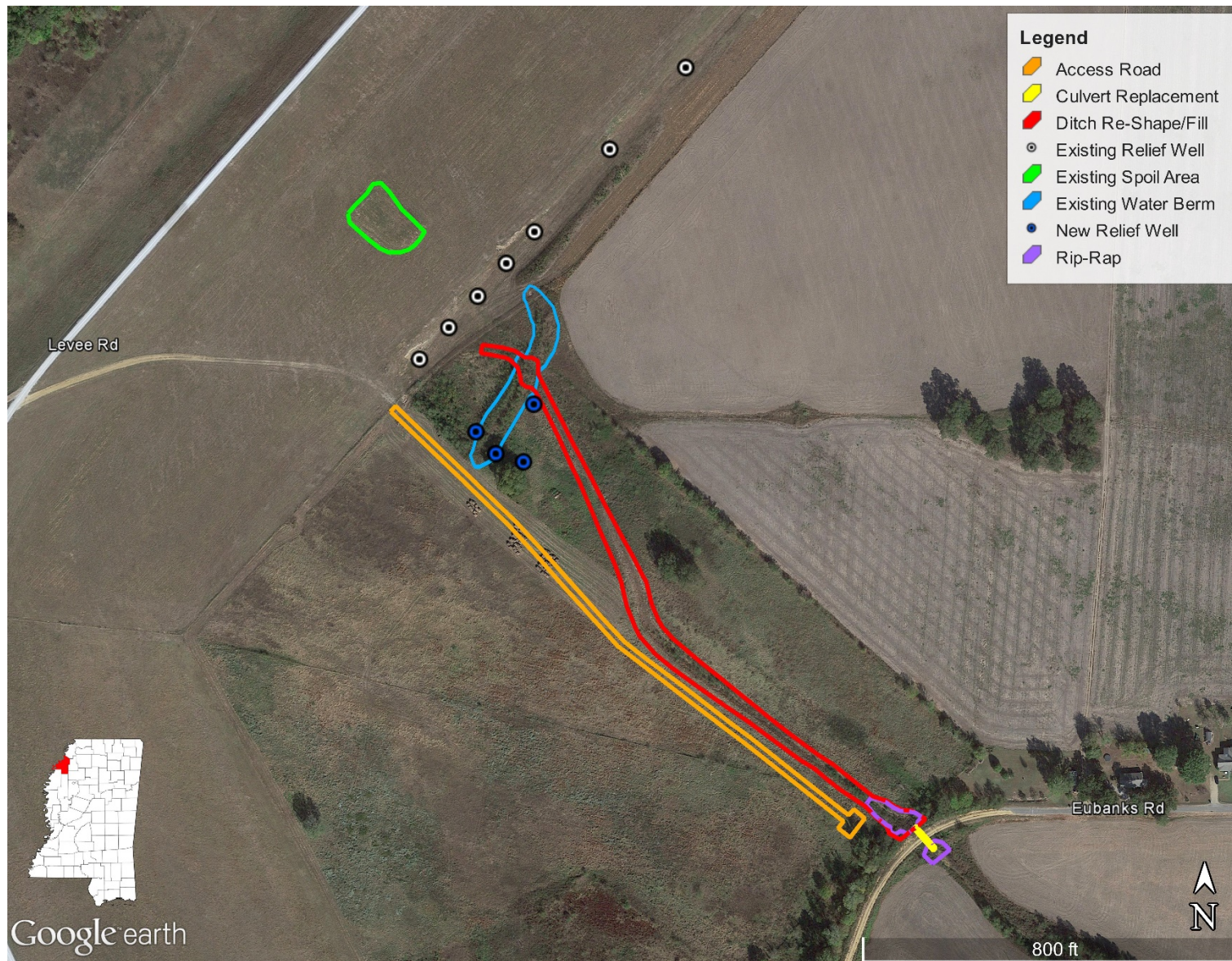


Figure 2. Proposed seepage control measures along the Mississippi River mainline levee at the Rena Lara project area, Coahoma County, Mississippi.

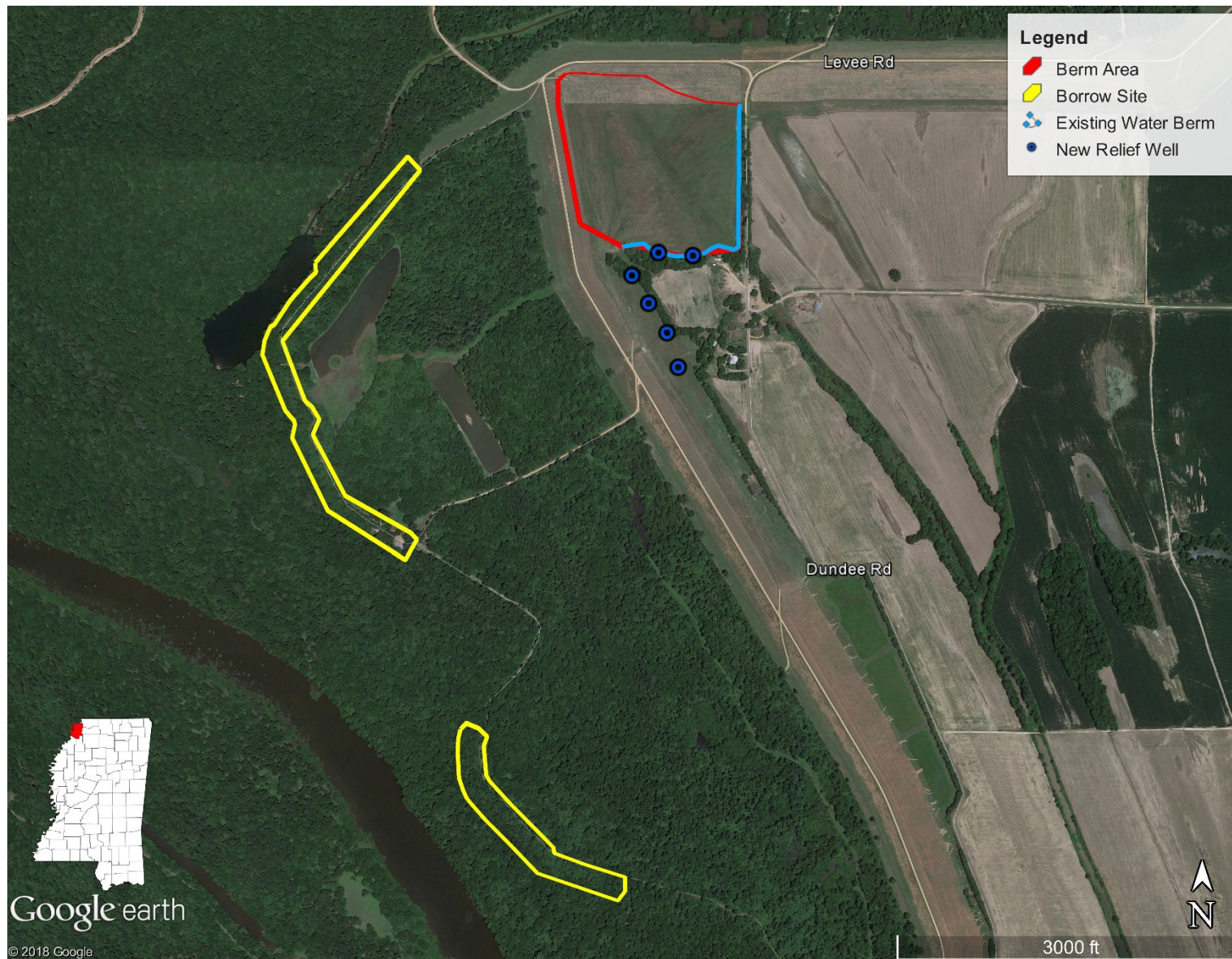


Figure 3. Proposed seepage control measures along the Mississippi River mainline levee at the Trotters project area, Tunica County, Mississippi.