

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE
ILLINOIS STATE CONFERENCE
P.O. BOX 1524, SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS 62705



July 1, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

In the capacity of environmental advocate through our Environmental and Climate Justice Committee, the Illinois Conference of the NAACP requests that you and your administration protect the safety and well-being of communities in Illinois, Missouri, and Kentucky by issuing a Clean Water Act veto of the St. Johns Bayou - New Madrid Floodway project. This U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project risks the lives and livelihoods of people of color and low income communities to secure financial gains for a few individuals.

In this Corps of Engineers \$165 million plan to build a new 60 foot high levee and two large pumping plants, a small group of landowners will be able to benefit through development and agricultural use of the New Madrid Floodway. Unfortunately this intensified use will make it even harder to access the Floodway for its intended purpose – protecting dozens of river communities from major floods.

During major floods on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, flood waters must be diverted in a timely manner into the New Madrid Floodway to prevent levees and floodwalls from overtopping in dozens of communities in Illinois, Missouri and Kentucky. The health, safety, and well-being of communities of color and low income populations are at particular risk.

Timely use of the Floodway is critical to the very survival of Cairo, Illinois where almost 70 percent of residents are African American and more than 44 percent of residents live below the poverty level. Many other communities also rely on timely use of the New Madrid Floodway, including Charleston, Missouri where 50 percent of residents are African American and almost 30 percent of residents live below the poverty level; Hickman, Kentucky where more than 34 percent of residents are African American and more than 26 percent of residents live below the poverty level; and Paducah Kentucky where almost 24 percent of residents are African American and almost 24 percent of residents live below the poverty level.

Operating the New Madrid Floodway is already experiencing opposition and delays. As flood waters were rising in 2011, the state of Missouri sued the Corps of Engineers to stop the Floodway's use. The resulting delay led to the flooding of more than 200 structures in Olive Branch, Illinois and a mandatory evacuation of Cairo. Cairo could have been completely destroyed by any further delay. Once the Floodway was used, water levels at Cairo dropped 1 foot in just 6 hours, and 2.7 feet in just 48 hours.

The St. Johns Bayou – New Madrid Floodway project will put communities at even greater risk of catastrophic flooding by creating more obstacles and opposition to the Floodway's use. Concerns for community safety and opposition to the significant environmental impacts of the project have led dozens of local, state, and federal leaders to join more than 90 conservation and advocacy organizations and 23,000 members of the public to call for an end to this project.

We urge you to issue a Clean Water Act veto of the St. Johns Bayou – New Madrid Floodway project to remove the threat that it poses to river communities once and for all. Federal investments in this area should instead be used to keep our communities safe and advance economic equality.

Sincerely,



Teresa Haley, President

Illinois Conference National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

cc: The Honorable Gina McCarthy, Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency
The Honorable Jo-Ellen Darcy, Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)
Christy Goldfuss, Managing Director, Council on Environmental Quality

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