

Re: Geology is a dangerous business

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 - *Date:* Fri, 25 Nov 2005 15:25:34 -0600
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SBC Yahoo wrote:

I was not analyzing the entire Miss. flood plain, just the New Orleans disaster. I have used the Corps computer modeling programs for hydrology, since this is necessary for getting projects approved by them.

But, as George notes, the entire Mississippi River flood plain, from Minnesota and Montana and upstream of Cincinnati (including the Missouri and Ohio River valleys, as having first order effects on the stem stream) to Louisiana is one system. You poke it here, it belches there. You keep dirt in the Dakotas, it doesn't accumulate in Louisiana.

At one time, the ACE had several scale models of the RIVER on which they ran real world (water, sand and clay) scenarios. Those have been abandoned in favor of computer models, which (while cleaner, and you can keep them on a laptop) have their pitfalls.

Since the ACE is charged with the 'control' of the Mississippi they are the ones who need to keep screaming until they get their way, and not expect all other stakeholders to roll over and play dead. The reality of the matter is: many many political agendas control the Army Corps. And in that agenda ecosystem (President, Congress, US Fish & Wildlife, State governments, Generals, Engineers, civilian and military employees, commercial river operators, the general public and yes, even environmentalists) have their voices to be heard. The only 'pull' the public and environmentalists have are getting the functionaries to obey the laws of the US. Otherwise, they may be ignored. Now, it is your right not to like environmental law. But it is the law...and not even the military has the option to disregard it in civilian venues (like the Mississippi River drainage system).

I was impressed with their knowledge and depth of personnel on hydrology (Denver CO office), flood plains and drainage in general. I'll take the Corps' word any day over some loony

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environmentalist, lamenting we must save the - - - - - (fill in the blank).

I wouldn't. Not all environmentalists are loony, and not all engineers are ethical. If people on both sides worked toward a reasonable, common ground middle, we wouldn't be having this discussion. But they will not, usually because there is some profit to them.

We are not stuck with what nature left us (wetlands, etc.), we can make it better or change it entirely. That is why humans are superior to animals, we can change our environment. We just need to be sure we know the consequences of our actions, and find them acceptable.

Animals change their environments, too. Just ask anyone who lives in a high deer population area. Any overpopulated species (including humans) changes the environment. Only humans seem to think it is a virtue. You know, most enviros would agree with your last statement (except that they are skeptical that people know all the consequences of their actions in advance, and they disagree that they find them acceptable).

No one asked me. But a middle ground answer for New Orleans seems the most logical--rebuild and maintain the port and oil industrial facilities, ban the residential repopulation of the most extremely subsided area, mitigate where reasonable, and build new houses on higher ground. Use geology and topo maps for some good planning, for lands sakes, BEFORE fixing what's broke in the same way, in the same place. Work for barrier and wetland restoration through the use of engineering solutions (ACE is aces at creating artificial wetlands, you know--the 'keep busy' beavers can do excellently whatever they are directed to). Provide incentives for the temporarily displaced to stay in their new communities, by reuniting families still torn apart. Build Morgan City (or some other town) as a 'backup port'. Use re-sedimentation lessons being learned in the Grand Canyon to open the gates on locks and dams upstream, flush out some of those reservoirs, and put more dirt back on Louisiana. Heck, if 9th Ward residents want another ethnic enclave in Louisiana (on higher ground) help them build it.

Unfortunately, the US is not in the business of engineering according to sustainable principles on a 100 year plus timeframe or socially responsible development--the answer here is always and only the short term profit motive.

After 1993, the town of Valmeyer, IL, said the hell with this...they moved their town 5 miles from the river and up a steep incline. It wasn't

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cheap short term, but is more frugal, long term. If people in New Orleans don't have the brains to move out of the water--especially those who've been given a jumpstart by having been forcibly moved--it is hard to generate much sympathy for them.