

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2404

June 5, 2019

Major General Richard G. Kaiser
Commander, Mississippi Valley Division
President, Mississippi River Commission
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
4155 Clay Street
Vicksburg, MS 39183

Re: Urgent Request for Action Regarding the Bonnet Carré Spillway Opening

Dear General Kaiser,

I am writing to you deeply concerned about the devastating impact that Mississippi's coastal ecosystems face by the historically unprecedented re-opening of the Bonnet Carré Spillway ("BCS"). Earlier this year, Louisiana officials and the Army Corps of Engineers decided to open BCS for forty-three days, from February 27 to April 11. BCS was opened again less than a month later on May 10. In its 88-year history, BCS had never before been opened twice in the same year. BCS has introduced infiltrating freshwater that disrupted the Mississippi Sound's ecosystem and caused substantial loss of marine mammal life. This damage will be worsened in the coming weeks.

Allowing freshwater from BCS to flow into and disrupt the Mississippi Sound's already-damaged ecosystem will exponentiate ecological harm and result in potentially irreversible loss. I respectfully request the Army Corps of Engineers communicate a transparent plan that mitigates current ecological damage as well as establishes preventative measures that will ensure the situation does not repeat itself.

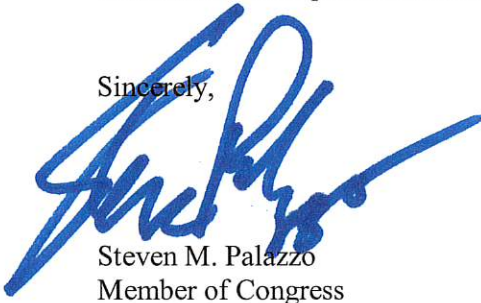
The Mississippi coast is a sportsman's paradise and home to a flourishing seafood industry hallmarked by world-renowned oyster and shrimp beds. Collectively these distinguishing elements form the quintessence of South Mississippi. When spillways release vast amounts of freshwater and polluted river water, this very life blood is threatened. Mississippi's celebrated oysters have had their populations decimated; the last crab catch yielded a third less crabs than average; and significantly decreased shrimp sampling will likely delay the opening of this year's season.

The Institute for Marine Mammal Studies recently observed 108 dolphin carcasses, many with freshwater lesions. Along the Mississippi coast, April was the deadliest month in the last five years for dolphins and sea turtles. This year's inundation of freshwater is responsible for more dolphin deaths than the 2010 BP oil spill. To avoid irreparable damage and to better understand the long-term downstream effects of spillways, an independent study of the Mississippi Sound marine ecosystem must be done to examine population dynamics, health, and important habitats.

While flood control management is a primary concern for southern Mississippi, so too is safeguarding our natural resources and ensuring Mississippi maintains its prosperous seafood and recreational tourism industries. We must protect our farmers and fishermen and the economies they support. The Mississippi River Commission's actions directly and substantially impact the Mississippi coastal economy. The Mississippi Sound suffers the negative impacts and none of the benefits. Yet, Mississippians with livelihoods dependent on coastal ecosystems do not have a voice in the conversation. To ensure all key stakeholders and interests are represented, I respectfully request, henceforth, Mississippi be granted a permanent position on the commission to faithfully represent the interests of the fishery and tourism communities.

If statutory constraints prohibit the commission from granting permanent representation, I look forward to working with your office in drafting a legislative solution that ensures all those affected by the commission are represented in the decision-making process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steven M. Palazzo", is written over the word "Sincerely,".

Steven M. Palazzo
Member of Congress

Cc: R.D. James, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works.