

THE WICKER REPORT

SENATOR WICKER'S WEEKLY REPORT  from CONGRESS

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Wicker Encouraged by Recent News on the Bonnet Carré Spillway

A New Court Ruling Shows Progress

In 2019, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers took action that caused great harm to small businesses and the ecosystem of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. In order to relieve high water levels on the Mississippi River, the Corps opened the Bonnet Carré Spillway twice – for a total of 123 days – sending a flood of sediment-laden, fresh water into the saltwater Mississippi Sound.

Last month, a U.S. District Judge issued a ruling that moves us one step closer to ensuring that a disaster like 2019 does not happen again. The corps is now required to consult with the National Marine Fisheries Service about the impact of such Spillway openings.

How We Got Here

Built in the aftermath of the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, the Spillway had never been opened twice in one year and never for such a long period of time. The damage to the Mississippi Sound from these unprecedented measures in 2019 was almost immediate.

Polluted water from the Bonnet Carré Spillway likely killed more than 90 percent of oysters on Mississippi harvest reefs, and shrimp landings were reduced by 50 percent. Harmful algae blooms closed Mississippi beaches, devastating the local tourism industry during the crucial summer months. Years of post-Hurricane Katrina Gulf Coast recovery work was undone.

This disaster affected every Mississippian, not just those living along the Gulf Coast. Local businesses provide thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in tax revenue for local and state governments. Mississippi needed relief, and I worked with state and federal officials to secure more than \$21 million from the Department of Commerce to cover losses incurred by fishermen, aquaculture businesses, and seafood processors.

While this support was welcome, it was not a long-term solution. Four years later, Mississippi communities still feel the effects of 2019. Gulf Coast communities should not be expected to contend with prolonged Spillway openings when heavy rain leads to high water upstream. And going forward, the impact of such Spillway openings on Mississippi needs to be considered in flood-control operations.

As a member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, I championed a provision in the Water Resources Development Act that directed the Corps to conduct a Lower Mississippi River Comprehensive Management Study. This federally-funded study will identify changes and new features that could help reduce the risk of flooding and decrease reliance on the Bonnet Carré Spillway. I will advocate for the Corps to conduct this study in a timely manner, and I look forward to reviewing its recommendations.

During the last Congress, I also introduced the FLOODS Act, which the President signed in December. This new law will establish a National Integrated Flood Information System and improve flood watches and warnings, a critical step to protect lives and livelihoods along the Gulf Coast.

The Work Continues

Thanks to the tireless advocacy of local Mississippi governments, nonprofits, and small-business owners, the Bonnet Carré Spillway issue is getting the attention it deserves. I echo my counterparts in the Mississippi state legislature who are working to pass a resolution in support of groups like the Mississippi Sound Coalition, an organization that has been in this fight from the beginning. Their efforts are beginning to pay off.

As Gulf Coast residents and business owners know, this work is not over. I recently urged the National Marine Fisheries Service to meet with the Mississippi Sound Coalition. I will continue to ensure that Mississippians' concerns are heard loud and clear in Washington.

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