Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 14, 2012

The Honorable Jo-Ellen Darcy
Office of the Assistance Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0108

Dear Assistant Secretary Darcy:

We are very disappointed to learn of your request that the Mississippi Valley Division Commander withhold submission and publication of the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) of the St. Johns Bayou and New Madrid Floodway project.

This critical project has been under development for over three decades. During this time, significant contributions and input have been put forth by both the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to ensure the project takes environmental impacts into account. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and local sponsors have gone to great lengths over the years to accommodate the concerns and suggestions put forth by both agencies. The USACE and local sponsors have worked together for years to make modifications to the project while providing an unprecedented amount of local mitigation lands that will greatly enhance the environment, not only of the project area, but the entire region.

The USACE's unwillingness or inability to explain what exactly the concerns are in regards to mitigation may lead some to question the motives behind this action taken by the administration. After all the time, work and energy put into this project, particularly by the USACE and local sponsors, requests to withhold the EIS appear to our constituents as an effort by FWS and EPA to undermine the project for the people of New Madrid and Mississippi counties in Missouri.

We understand representatives from USACE, EPA and FWS will visit the project site in early October. We encourage you to invite a representative from the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) since this agency has jurisdiction and expertise on wetland designations. NRCS's involvement would be helpful to the other agency representatives in addressing their outstanding concerns.

We also encourage you to have these agency representatives take the time to witness firsthand the benefits of this project, both for the environment and for flood control purposes. Each representative visiting the site should take the time to meet with the local stakeholders and to truly listen to their perspectives. It is critical that each agency has a true understanding of the project before making a decision to delay its completion. We also request a meeting with you as soon as possible to discuss your concerns and to work towards resolving the issues that are delaying this critical project.

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We appreciate your attention to this very important matter to our constituents. We stand ready to do whatever is necessary to accommodate your concerns and move this project forward. The livelihoods of people in Southeast Missouri depend on it.

Sincerely,

ROY BLUNT
United States Senator

JO ANN EMERSON
Member of Congress