

**Alabama Environmental Council \* Altamaha Riverkeeper \* American Bottom Conservancy \* American Rivers \* Amigos de Bolsa Chica \* Apalachicola Riverkeeper \* Appalachian Center for the Economy and the Environment \* Arkansas Wildlife Federation \* Blue Planet Projects \* Butte Environmental Council \* Citizens Against Widening the Industrial Canal \* Clean Up the River Environment \* Clean Water Network \* Columbia River Crab Fisherman's Association \* Columbia Riverkeeper \* Conservation Council of North Carolina \* Cry of the Water \* Delta Land Trust \* Door County Environmental Council \* Endangered Habitats League \* Environmental Action Committee of West Marin \* Environmental Defense Fund \* Federation of Fly Fishers \* Florida Atlantic University \* Florida Wildlife Federation \* Friends of Blackwater Canyon \* Friends of the Earth \* Friends of the Kaw \* Friends of the Rivers of Virginia \* Friends of the Santa Clara River \* Georgia Wildlife Federation \* Great Egg Harbor Watershed Association \* Gulf Restoration Network \* Help Save the Apalachicola River Group \* Highway J Citizens Group, U.A. \* Holy Cross Neighborhood Association \* Humboldt North Coast Land Trust \* Izaak Walton League of America \* Kansas Wildlife Federation \* Kentucky Resources Council \* Kentucky Waterways Alliance \* Levees.Org \* Lone Tree Council \* Louisiana Environmental Action Network \* Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper \* Mid South Fly Fishers \* Minnesota Conservation Federation \* Mississippi Wildlife Federation \* Missouri Coalition for the Environment \* National Wildlife Federation \* Natural Resources Defense Council \* Nebraska Wildlife Federation \* New York/New Jersey Baykeeper \* Northwest Environmental Advocates \* Ohio Environmental Council \* Ohio River Foundation \* Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition \* Passaic River Coalition \* People to Save the Sheyenne \* Potomac River Association \* Prairie Rivers Network \* Prairie Rivers Network \* Quadcities Citizens Against Triumph \* Raritan Riverkeeper \* River Alliance of Wisconsin \* River Valley Wildlife Federation \* Rivers Unlimited \* Satilla Riverkeeper \* Save The River \* Sierra Club \* South Carolina Coastal Conservation League \* South Dakota Wildlife Federation \* South Yuba River Citizens League \* Surfers' Environmental Alliance \* Surfrider Foundation \* Surfrider Foundation Ventura County Chapter \* Tennessee Clean Water Network \* Texas Conservation Alliance \* The Green School \* The River Project \* Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council \* Tualatin Riverkeepers \* Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper \* Western Lake Erie Waterkeeper Association \* Yell County Wildlife Federation**

May 5, 2008

Honorable Stephen Johnson  
Administrator  
United States Environmental Protection Agency  
Ariel Rios Building (1101A)  
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20460

Re: Yazoo Backwater Pumping Project, Mississippi; EPA-R04-OW-2008-0179

Dear Administrator Johnson:

The undersigned 85 organizations are members of the Corps Reform Network, which is dedicated to improving the policies and practices of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (“Corps”) to ensure that Corps projects protect, instead of damage, the environment. Our organizations strongly support the Environmental Protection Agency’s proposed Clean Water Act section 404(c) veto of the Yazoo Backwater Pumping Plant (Yazoo Pumps), and urge you to finalize that veto as quickly as possible.

The Yazoo Pumps project is well recognized as one of the “worst of the worst” of Corps projects, and it embodies everything that our organizations are seeking to change in Corps project planning. It will use \$220 million federal tax dollars to cause enormous – and completely unnecessary – environmental harm. It is based on a highly flawed Corps study that does not accurately assess the project’s adverse impacts and that does not even attempt to propose effective mitigation. The Yazoo Pumps would destroy nationally significant wetland resources, including tens of thousands of acres of wetlands that the public is currently paying to protect, to benefit a small handful of large landowners.

In 2000, the Environmental Protection Agency said that the Yazoo Pumps would drain and damage more than 200,000 acres of ecologically significant wetlands. The Corps says that the project would drain and damage 67,000 acres of wetlands. As discussed below, evidence shows that the Corps’ assessment vastly understates the wetland impacts of the Yazoo Pumps, but even under the Corps’ incomplete wetlands assessment, the Yazoo Pumps would cause wetlands damage that dwarfs the combined wetland impacts of all other projects vetoed under the Clean Water Act.

The wetlands that would be drained by the Yazoo Pumps are some of the richest natural resources in the nation, and are located in one of the only four remaining backwater ecosystems with a hydrologic connection to the Mississippi River. Drained wetlands would include wetlands that federal taxpayers are already paying to protect on National Forest and National Wildlife Refuge lands and on lands enrolled in both the wetlands reserve and conservation reserve programs. These wetlands are vital to fish and wildlife, including to a host of migratory birds and waterfowl that live out much of their lives far beyond the borders of Mississippi. Loss of these wetlands would have significant adverse impacts to fish, wildlife, and recreation.

As horrendous as the Corps’ wetlands assessment is, it is clear that 67,000 acres would be just the starting point for the damage that would be caused by the Yazoo Pumps. The Corps has inexplicably ignored impacts to wetlands that are sustained by rainfall instead of by backwater flooding, and has completely ignored impacts to short-hydroperiod wetlands. An independent hydrology analysis prepared for two Corps Reform Network Members, the National Wildlife Federation and American Rivers, also shows that the Corps’ hydrologic modeling was fundamentally flawed, leading the Corps to vastly understate the wetland impacts.<sup>1</sup> That study

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<sup>1</sup> Nutter & Associates, Inc, Technical Memorandum No. 07-059.01, *Review of the USACE Yazoo River Backwater Area Reformulation Report*, January 22, 2008 (prepared for the National Wildlife Federation and American Rivers and submitted into the record as part of comments on the Corps’ Final SEIS for the Yazoo Pumps).

shows that, at an absolute minimum, the Yazoo Pumps would completely drain 37,000 more acres of wetlands than identified by the Corps. It also shows that the Corps has not identified the full extent of wetlands that would suffer from less than complete drainage.

Regrettably, the Corps' flawed planning for the Yazoo Pumps is not out of the ordinary. In 2006, the Government Accountability Office told Congress that recent Corps studies were so flawed that they could "not provide a reasonable basis for decision-making." Those studies, like the one for the Yazoo Pumps, "were fraught with errors, mistakes, and miscalculations, and used invalid assumptions and outdated data."<sup>2</sup>

We urge the Environmental Protection Agency to finalize the Yazoo Pumps veto as quickly as possible to ensure the protection of the vast aquatic resources at risk from this project.

Sincerely,

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Corps of Engineers, Observations on Planning and Project Management Processes for the Civil Works Program*, March 2006, (GAO-06-529T).

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