Alternatives to the Yazoo Backwater Pumping Plant

Numerous federal programs are currently funded, accepting proposals, and available to reduce flood risks and increase resilience in the Yazoo Backwater Area (YBWA) in Mississippi. These programs fund non-structural measures and restoration of natural infrastructure to provide critical protections for communities and businesses—with no adverse environmental impacts.

1. Post-Disaster Recovery Programs (FEMA, USDA, HUD)

Post-disaster recovery programs are available to areas covered by a Presidential disaster declaration. These programs compensate homeowners and others for voluntarily moving out of harm’s way, elevating damaged homes and business, and improving essential community infrastructure. These measures reduce flood risks and emergency response costs, create safer and healthier communities, and support economic development. These programs are available to reduce flood risks in the YBWA as a result of the 2019 Presidential disaster declaration that covered the YBWA floods of 2019.2

- **FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP):** The HMGP provides grants to state and local governments in areas covered by a Presidential disaster declaration. These grants can be used to purchase flood-damaged properties from willing sellers at pre-flood values and preserve the land as open space, or to elevate structures. Any structure in the 100-year floodplain (i.e., a Special Flood Hazard Area) valued at up to $276,000 automatically qualifies for a FEMA-funded buy-out, and any structure in a Special Hazard Area valued at up to $175,000 automatically qualifies for a FEMA-funded elevation. Other structures may also qualify if a benefit-cost analysis shows that a buy-out or elevation would be cost-effective.

- **USDA Community Facilities Grant Program:** The Community Facilities Grant Program provides grants to rural communities with up to 20,000 residents in areas covered by a Presidential disaster declaration. Grants can be on more than 100 types of projects, including the purchase, construction, or improvement of essential community facilities. Essential community facilities include such things as health care facilities, town halls, courthouses, community centers, fairgrounds, police and fire departments, libraries, museums, and food banks.

- **HUD Community Development Block Grants – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR):** Congress could also appropriate monies to fund CDBG-DR grants for the YBWA. CDBG-DR grants supplement FEMA disaster recovery funds to help cities, counties, and states recover from Presidentially-declared disasters, especially in low-income communities. Activities funded through these flexible grants must meet one of three national objectives: benefit persons of low-and-moderate-income; aid in the prevention or elimination of slums or blight; or meet other community development needs having a particular urgency because existing conditions pose a

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1 The YBWA is the only area that would be drained by the Yazoo Pumps, and as a result is the only area that could receive any type of flood damage reduction benefits from the Yazoo Pumps.

2 The YBWA is subject to the April 23, 2019 Federal Disaster Declaration 4429, which made FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Grant Program and USDA’s Community Facilities Grant Program available to address damage in the YBWA resulting from the 2019 flood. Multiple amendments were made to that declaration, with the last amendment on September 20, 2019.
serious and immediate threat to the health or welfare of the community where other financial resources are not available to meet such needs.

2. Pre-Disaster Mitigation Programs (FEMA)

The Federal Emergency Management Agency pre-disaster mitigation programs provide grants to communities to carry out pre-disaster mitigation measures that reduce loss of life and property damage from floods, minimize flood disaster disruption, and allow more rapid recovery when flooding does occur. On average, $1 spent on hazard mitigation through a federally funded mitigation grant saves $6 in future disaster costs. Federal grants provide $7 in benefits for each $1 invested in riverine flood mitigation. These programs are available to communities in the YBWA.

- **FEMA Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program:** The Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) program provides funding to states, tribes, and local governments to reduce overall risk to the population and structures from future hazard events while also reducing reliance on federal funding to recover from future disasters. The PDM program covers up to 75% of eligible activity costs, but small and impoverished communities may be eligible for coverage of up to 90% of eligible costs.

- **FEMA Flood Mitigation Assistance Program:** The Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) Program provides funding to states, tribes, and local governments to reduce or eliminate the risk of repetitive flood damage to buildings and structures insured under the National Flood Insurance Program. FMA funding may cover up to 100% of costs to address severe repetitive loss properties and up to 90% of costs to address repetitive loss properties. Other activities are funded up to 75%.

- **FEMA Floodplain Management Training:** To more successfully administer the above and other disaster assistance and mitigation programs, FEMA provides free workshops for elected officials and community administrators. Trainings include information on the National Flood Insurance Program, including its history, standards, regulations and administration; floodplain mapping; flood hazard mitigation; and floodplain management for environmental benefits. FEMA can also provide additional trainings, if requested by local officials, in the YBWA through its Integrated Emergency Management Course.

- **Floodplain Management Certification and Continuing Education Programs:** The Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM) offers a Certified Floodplain Management program for public and private sector professionals that compliments the FEMA floodplain management trainings. The ASFPM seeks to promote education, policies and activities that mitigate current and future losses, costs and human suffering caused by flooding, and to protect the natural and beneficial functions of floodplains - all without causing adverse impacts. Anyone can join ASFPM and take the CFM exam for a nominal fee. ASFPM members and Certified Floodplain Managers© have access to unique resources that can help their communities more effectively administer FEMA programs, reduce flood insurance rates and minimize flood damages.

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3 The PDM program is transitioning into the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program established by the Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2018. The BRIC program will be funded through a 6% equivalency set-aside of all disaster expenditures from the Disaster Relief Fund. This should significantly increase the amount of funding available for pre-disaster mitigation efforts.
3. **Wetland Reserve and Floodplain Easement Programs (USDA)**

The Wetland Reserve Easement and Floodplain Easement Programs provide direct payments to landowners to place conservation easements on wetland and floodplain lands, and also pay to restore the enrolled lands to avoid future flood risks and increase resilience. Many lands in the YBWA are eligible for enrollment in these programs.

Wetlands reduce flood and storm risks for communities, improve water quality, and provide vital wildlife habitat. A single acre of wetland can store one million gallons of floodwater. Enrolling cropped wetlands in the Wetland Reserve Easement Program reduces the costs of commodity, federal crop insurance, and noninsured crop disaster assistance programs. Protecting and restoring floodplain wetlands can significantly lower federal flood insurance rates for communities participating in the National Flood Insurance Program Community Rating System. Restoring lands enrolled in these programs creates jobs, and the restored wetlands help purify water supplies, reduce nutrient loading into streams and rivers, and recharge groundwater supplies. By providing vital wildlife habitat, restored wetlands also help support a vibrant outdoor economy. In 2011, state residents and nonresidents spent $2.63 billion on wildlife recreation in Mississippi.4 Restoring bottomland hardwood wetlands in the YBWA is a priority for achieving the forest bird population goals for the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture.

- **USDA Wetland Reserve Easement Program:** Cropped and forested lands can be enrolled in the Wetland Reserve Easement Program. Enrolled lands are taken out of agricultural production and restored to wetlands. Enrollment provides direct payments to landowners, currently up to $3,100 per acre. USDA also pays to restore the enrolled lands. Landowners can make additional profits by selling or leasing the land for hunting, fishing, or other uses compatible with maintaining the restoration. Landowners may also be eligible for a tax deduction.

- **USDA Floodplain Easement Program:** Both cropland and residential properties may be enrolled in the USDA Floodplain Easement program. Cropped lands are taken out of agricultural production and restored. Structures located within the area of a floodplain easement are demolished and removed, or relocated outside of the affected floodplain, and the lands are then restored. Enrollment provides direct payments to landowners, currently up to $3,100 per acre. USDA pays to restore the enrolled lands. USDA also pays the costs of demolishing and removing, or relocating structures out of the affected floodplain. Landowners can make additional profits by selling or leasing the land for hunting, fishing, or other uses compatible with maintaining the restoration. Landowners may also be eligible for a tax deduction.

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