



NEWS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BUILDING STRONG®

For Immediate Release:
January 13, 2022

Contact:
Brooke Magary 314-331-8068
Brooke.E.Magary@usace.army.mil

It's time to update what you know about Wood River's levee system: a brief history and timeline of the system

ST. LOUIS, Mo. – Initially organized in 1910, the Wood River Drainage and Levee District (WRDLD) protects approximately 20,000 individuals and industry, transportation infrastructure, and 13,700 acres valued at \$1.5 billion within Madison County. Over the past century, many things have made this infrastructure the resilient system it is today, protecting portions of Alton, East Alton, Wood River, Roxana, Hartford, and South Roxana.

In 1938, the Flood Control Act officially authorized the Wood River Flood Protection Project, with the original federal flood risk reduction improvements beginning in 1947. From 1947-1964, numerous contracts were issued to build/improve the levees. These projects included flood risk reduction features like pump stations, relief wells, gatewells, closure structures, and gravity drains. This phase of construction was completed on 31 March 1964. "Many of the original features are still relied upon today," said President of the WRDLD Board of Commissioners Charles Johansen. "The District continuously monitors and maintains all of these features to ensure that they provide the same level of protection today as they did in the '40s and '50s."

In the late '80s, more improvements and repairs materialized, including relocating the Lock and Dam and the Alton Pump Station to its current site. However, by the early 2000s, the system's resiliency became a concern, and the system was at risk of losing accreditation. This accreditation standard requires demonstration that the levees will adequately reduce flood risk for the 100-year flood event, a flood that has a 1% chance of occurring in any given year. Fortunately, the WRDLD partnered with the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Southwestern Illinois Flood Prevention District Council (SWIFPD) on the Wood River Levee System Reconstruction Project to construct improvements to failing infrastructure throughout the District.

This partnership successfully addressed deficiencies and prevented losing accreditation and, with it, the ability to participate in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Flood Insurance Program. Starting in 2014, major construction on the Upper and Lower Wood River Systems improved underseepage protection and increased instrumentation to monitor the levee's health.

A recently completed \$26M investment by the USACE and the WRDLD constructed deep cut-off walls to protect against groundwater seepage under a section of levee. "During the 2019 flood, the levee performed well by keeping the public safe, but with two more features of work heading into construction phase (1 additional pump station and 46 additional relief wells), this system will perform even better. This flood risk reduction investment is a true testament to the partnership between the Corps, the SWIFPD Council, and the Levee District, who each have a component of the design, construction, and funding requirements," said Hal Graef, Project Manager with the USACE.

Local leaders and the levee district are not stopping there. Although the status of the levee currently meets minimum accreditation standards, there are plans for additional flood risk reduction features, such as relief wells, seepage

berms, and pump stations, to continue to improve the resiliency of the Wood River levees. This ongoing work, along with a newly updated Emergency Operations Plan, help achieve the most crucial goal – improve life safety for those who depend on the system. “Our collaboration with the Corps and the WRDLD on the updated plan focused on our top priority – improving the safety of our community,” said Wood River Mayor Tom Stalcup. “It takes strong partnerships and continued investments by all to keep our system resilient and our community safe.”

It's essential to recognize that while these levee systems reduce flood risk to people, businesses, critical infrastructure, and the environment, they do not eliminate flood risk. Continued investment and attention are essential to ensuring their resiliency for years to come. With many changes and improvements throughout the Wood River Area, the USACE, the WRDLD, and Wood River city officials want you to know your risk, know your role, and take action to reduce your risk. “Strong infrastructure is only one part of public safety. Promoting awareness and keeping the community informed of their risk builds resiliency and allows the public to make informed decisions to be prepared,” said Wood River Police Chief Brad Wells.

The National Levee Database contains comprehensive information about our nation's levees. You can find detailed information on the Wood River Levee System, including maps of the areas they protect on the National Levee Database at nld.usace.army.mil.