



# The Delta Council Review

Vol. 16, Issue No. 1

THE NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS AND MEMBERS OF DELTA COUNCIL

May 2023

## SENATOR BOOZMAN TO KEYNOTE DELTA COUNCIL 88TH ANNUAL MEETING TO BE HELD FRIDAY, JUNE 2, 2023

Delta Council President, **Wade Litton** of Greenwood, is pleased to announce U.S. Senator for Arkansas, **John Boozman**, as the Keynote Speaker for the organization's 88th Annual Meeting to be held Friday, June 2, 2023, at Delta State University's Bologna Performing Arts Center (BPAC) in Cleveland, Mississippi.

"We are looking forward to the traditional celebration of regional cooperation through the work of Delta Council," said **Litton**. "In addition to all the customary activities that are part of Delta Council Day, we are also honored that Senator **Boozman's** colleague, our own Senator **Cindy Hyde-Smith**, will introduce him to the audience."

**John Boozman** is Arkansas's Senior U.S. Senator and the Dean of the State's Congressional delegation. A fifth-generation Arkansan, Senator **Boozman** was raised in Fort Smith and went on to play football



for the University of Arkansas Razorbacks. He graduated from the Southern College of Optometry in 1977 and entered private practice that same year, co-founding a family business with his brother that would ultimately become a major provider of eye care to Northwest Arkansas.

Decades of experience as a successful healthcare provider and a small business owner guide Sen. **Boozman's** approach to governing. He is committed to advocating for economic policies that help small businesses continue to grow and add jobs to the economy. He has been a consistent champion for farmers, ranchers, and loggers and was instrumental in the fight for an equitable farm bill.

Sen. **Boozman** serves as the Ranking Member of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry during the 118th Congress. This position enables him to play

a key role in influencing policy that relates to the agriculture economy, nutrition programs and quality of life in rural America. He will also continue to serve on the Committee on Appropriations, which is responsible for allocating federal funds, and the Committee on the Environment and Public Works, where much of the nation's infrastructure policy is developed.

First elected to the Senate in 2010, Sen. **Boozman** was sworn in for a third term on January 3, 2023. Prior to serving in the Senate, he represented the people of the Third District of Arkansas in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Sen. **Boozman** is married to the former Cathy Marley, and they currently reside in Rogers, AR. The couple has three daughters and four grandchildren.

The 2023 Delta Council Day will commence with the 20th Annual Salute to Delta Honor Graduates Event at 9:00 a.m., held outside of the Bologna Performing

ANNUAL MEETING *cont. on page 3*

## EPA AND CORPS PRESENT YAZOO BACKWATER PUMPING STATION PROPOSAL

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), along with the assistance of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, have reached a preferred approach to solve persistent flooding in the Yazoo Backwater Area of the South Delta, officials announced Thursday, May 4, 2023.

On Thursday, May 4, and Friday, May 5, 2023, Federal officials presented a recommended 3-part solution to backwater flooding that includes a 25,000 cubic feet per second (CFS) pumping station, non-structural options such as buy-outs, ring levees, and home elevations, and

EPA AND CORPS *cont. on page 7*



**Brian Frazer**, Director of the Oceans, Wetlands and Communities Division, EPA; **Jeaneanne Gettle**, Director of the Water Division, Region 4 for the EPA; **Matt Strickler**, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks; **Michael Connor**, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works; **Stacey Jensen**, the Acting Director of Policy and Legislation in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works

## SAVE THE DATE

**DELTA COUNCIL  
88TH ANNUAL MEETING  
FRIDAY, JUNE 2, 2023**

**BOLOGNA PERFORMING  
ARTS CENTER  
DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY  
CLEVELAND, MS**

**9:00 AM**  
Salute to Delta Honor Graduates

**9:15 AM**  
Delta 1000

**10:30 AM**  
General Business Session

**12:00 PM**  
Catfish Luncheon and Achievement  
Awards on the Quadrangle





## DELTA COUNCIL

### 2022–2023 Delta Council Officers

President: WADE LITTON, Greenwood

Vice-President: VICTOR BYAS, Indianola

Vice-President: JULIA CLARK, Rolling Fork

Vice-President: TIM CLEMENTS, Greenville

Vice-President: PARKER ENGLAND, Greenville

Vice-President: HUNTER FORDICE, Vicksburg

Vice-President: LEWIS POINDEXTER, Indianola

Treasurer: CRAIG SHIDELER, Senatobia

#### POSTMASTER:

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## GUEST COLUMN | PUMP PROJECT BACK ON TRACK

BY TIM KALICH

Editor and Publisher, Greenwood Commonwealth



Kalich

The long-promised but never-delivered flood protection for the South Delta is back on track. Fingers crossed, it will stay that way and those flood-weary folks who have been regularly drowning in everyone else's water to the north will have long-term relief.

Last week, a collaboration of several federal agencies — most notably the Army Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service — rolled out their latest plan.

Most everyone — other than of course the die-hard environmentalists — appears to be on board with the concepts unveiled.

The plan calls for voluntary buyouts of homes most at risk of flooding, help to elevate homes that want to stay, the construction of ring levees and, most importantly, the installation of a massive pumping station that will put water into the Mississippi River when it backs up in the bowl that earlier flood-control projects have created.

The pump is the most expensive and most controversial part of the plan. For decades, it

has been opposed as either wasteful spending or as a threat to wetlands and wildlife in that part of the state.

To get this latest version through required a compromise as to determining at what elevation the pump would kick into gear. When the original plan for the so-called Yazoo Backwater Project was drawn up, it had the pump turning on when water elevation reached 80 feet, according to the Mississippi Levee Board. The compromise calls for turning the pump on at 90-foot elevation during the crop season, which the plan defines as March 25 through Oct. 31, and at 93 feet the rest of the year.

Farmers would like the crop season date to be a few weeks earlier and the pump-on elevations to be lower, but they are willing to live with this compromise to get the project built.

It would be nice if the environmental groups would do the same, rather than trying to stall or kill it with additional litigation, as they have done so often in the past.

When the flood-control plan for the Lower Mississippi River Valley was updated in the early 1940s, it had features that were supposed to ensure no part of the affected area got left out. The South Delta was promised a massive pumping station not to eliminate flooding in the region but to keep it to a livable level.

Both Republican and Democratic administrations have reneged on that

promise ever since. In this latest flip-flop, the Biden administration initially reversed the Trump administration's 11th hour decision to let the project go forward, but rather than killing it outright, the Democratic president's team sent everyone back to the drawing board to see if a compromise solution between pump proponents and opponents could be fashioned. Maybe this is finally it.

For going on 80 years, one mostly poor, thinly populated part of the country has paid the price for keeping others along the Mississippi River and its tributaries drier. The South Delta has become everyone else's safety valve in times of high water, putting not only cropland in that part of Mississippi in danger but also homes and wildlife itself, and not just once in a while but most years.

As with other recent proposals, this one would appear to provide a net benefit for the environment that will be greater with the pump than without it.

Yes, it's going to be expensive. The estimated cost has not been disclosed so far, but the previous estimate was around a half-billion dollars.

Whatever the number is, it must be remembered that the price tag would have been considerably less had opponents not stood in the way of doing what's fair for so long.

## SELBY NAMED EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF DELTA WILDLIFE AND DELTA F.A.R.M.



Selby

Ron Selby has been named the Executive Director of Delta Wildlife and Delta Farmers Advocating Resource Management (Delta F.A.R.M.), two natural resource and conservation stewardship organizations serving the Mississippi Delta from its headquarters in Stoneville.

Ron is a long-time Delta resident currently residing in Grenada. He earned a Bachelor of Science from Delta State University and an MBA from Millsaps College. He brings over 30 years of personal and professional experience to the table from an agricultural and wildlife perspective.

"Ron is the perfect fit to lead these two organizations - a tremendous sportsman who has an impressive background in agriculture, sales, and administration," said Tommy Goodwin, President of Delta Wildlife.

"We welcome Ron to this new role, and his selection has been met with overwhelming support from both Boards of Directors, the memberships, and our staff. Both organizations are operating at peak efficiency, and Ron's selection and leadership will only enhance our efforts," said Delta F.A.R.M. Chairman Reese Pillow.





## IHL BOARD OF TRUSTEES NAMES DR. DANIEL J. ENNIS AS NINTH PRESIDENT OF DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Following a nationwide search, the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning has appointed South Carolina educator **Dr. Daniel J. Ennis** as the ninth President of Delta State University at its meeting held this week in Jackson.

Currently serving as Provost and Executive Vice President of Coastal Carolina University in Conway, S.C., **Dr. Ennis** has served in several administrative roles at the university over the past 20 years, including Provost, Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts, Vice President for Academic Outreach, Chair of the Department of English, and Co-Director of the University Honors Program. A tenured professor of English, **Dr. Ennis** has been an assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor at Coastal Carolina.

"The positions **Dr. Ennis** has held at Coastal Carolina have prepared him extremely well to serve as president of Delta State University," said **Trustee Teresa Hubbard**, Chair of the Board Search Committee for the Delta State University President Search. "His long tenure



**Ennis**

there demonstrates how beloved he is by the campus community. His academic credentials, administrative skills, student-centered focus, and ability to connect students, faculty, alumni and the community make him a great fit for the university."

**Dr. Ennis** holds a bachelor's degree in English from The College of Charleston, a master's degree in English from Appalachian State University, and a doctorate in English from Auburn University. As a scholar,

he has received the Annibel Jenkins Prize in Performance & Theatre Studies from the South East American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies, has published books and articles on British literature and culture, and was a Fulbright-Hayes awardee in 2011.

**Dr. Ennis** will be on campus to meet with campus constituency groups in the near future and a full schedule of events will be announced soon. **Dr. Ennis** will begin serving as President of Delta State University on June 1, 2023.

### ANNUAL MEETING *from page 1*

Arts Center on the lawn. We will welcome the high school graduates, their families, and school officials and present the graduates with awards. The event is designed to bestow special honor upon two exemplary students from each of the high schools throughout the Mississippi Delta Region, including public, parochial, and private schools. In addition, a \$2,500 scholarship will be awarded to the top Delta Honor Graduate selected by higher education officials in the Delta. The Top Delta Honor Graduate will be recognized on stage at the Delta Council Annual Meeting during the Business Session.

At 10:30 a.m. in the auditorium of the BPAC, after the inaugural presentation of the colors and God and Country, the Business Session will proceed into the recognition of the 2023 Delta Council Community Service Award and the tradition of the Wear Cotton contest. Among other features of the Business

Session, including a recap of the year's challenges and opportunities, will be the introduction of the 2023-2024 Delta Council Officers. The meeting will be highlighted by a message from Keynote Speaker Senator **Boozman**.

The tradition of a fried catfish luncheon and Achievement Awards Ceremony will wrap up Delta Council Day on the grounds of the Quadrangle on the Delta State University campus. Delta Council invites and encourages members and guests to attend and participate in this 88-year-old Delta "red-letter" day.

Sponsors for the meeting are BankPlus, Catfish Farmers of Mississippi, Delta State University, Mississippi Corn Promotion Board, Mississippi Land Bank, Mississippi Rice Promotion Board, Mississippi Soybean Promotion Board, Simplot Grower Solutions, Southern Ag Credit, and U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol.

## HYDE-SMITH COMMITS TO MORE CDBG DISASTER RELIEF FUNDS FOR LONG-TERM MISS TORNADO RECOVERY

### MISS. SENATOR ADDRESSES RECOVERY NEEDS DURING APPROPRIATIONS PANEL REVIEW OF 2024 HUD BUDGET REQUEST



U.S. Senator **Cindy Hyde-Smith** committed to ensuring that Community Development Block Grant Disaster Relief (CDBG-DR) assistance is available to help tornado-damaged communities in Mississippi despite the anticipated depletion of existing FY2023 funding.

**Hyde-Smith**, the ranking member on the Senate Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Subcommittee, used a subcommittee hearing on the FY2024 budget request for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to discuss the recovery needs for Rolling Fork, Amory, and other Mississippi communities that sustained major tornado damage in late March. HUD Secretary **Marcia Fudge** testified.

"Secretary **Fudge**, as I noted in my opening remarks, the recent storms and tornadoes in Mississippi have had a devastating impact on the town of Rolling Fork, Silver City, Egypt, Amory, across four counties, and many communities," **Hyde-Smith** said. "We appreciate the President's commitment to the people of Mississippi and the FEMA assistance that is already on the ground and making a difference. I also appreciate HUD rolling out the program waivers in its disaster response toolbox."

"Although the data on unmet needs is still coming together, it's never too early to think about the longer-term recovery needs of these communities and families," said the Senator before turning to the allocation of CDBG-DR funds.

**Fudge** confirmed that \$162 million remains of the \$3.0 billion provided by Congress in FY2023 for CDBG-DR and that additional resources will be needed to meet the needs of disasters this year, including the Mississippi

tornadoes.

"We do have \$162 million remaining but we have yet to get all the information and data in from the storms in Florida and from other places. We know this \$162 million is not going to go very far. We are generally in the ballpark of \$3- to \$4 billion for storms for '21 and '22, and we don't see '23 to be any different, especially as it has started out the way it has," **Fudge** said. "Right now, those funds are allocated, but we will be coming to you for authorization as soon as we get data in from FEMA."

Following the hearing, **Hyde-Smith** said, "I appreciate Secretary **Fudge's** commitment to address the challenges facing Mississippians in recovering from the March tornadoes. There's work to be done on the ground and there's work to be done here to make sure federal resources are available. I'm committed to getting that done."

Regarding the overall FY2024 budget request for HUD, **Hyde-Smith** warned that the subcommittee will be hard pressed to fund all of the President's \$73.3 billion request, citing pending shortfalls in Federal Housing Administration and Ginnie Mae receipts.

"The Subcommittee faces the real prospect of a shortfall of at least \$13 billion, just to maintain fiscal year 2023 program levels," **Hyde-Smith** said.

"It is too early to know what our allocation will be, or even what a final Fiscal Year 2024 spending level will look like. However, it is clear we will need to make tough choices and that numerous proposals in the President's budget request may not be accommodated. Instead, it will be important to try and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the programs we fund within the constraints we have to operate," she concluded.

## AVERY RECEIVES DISTINGUISHED LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



**Dr. Anita Kelly, USAS President and former MSU Faculty member and Dr. Jimmy Avery**

**Dr. Jimmy Avery**, a Mississippi State University Extension professor at the National Warmwater Aquaculture Center at Delta Research and Extension Center and director of the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture Southern Regional Aquaculture Center, has received the United States Aquaculture Society's Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award for his contributions in research, education, Extension, and industry development.

The United States Aquaculture Society (USAS), a chapter of the World Aquaculture Society (WAS), provides a national forum for the exchange of timely information among aquaculture researchers, students, and industry members in the United States. The Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award recognizes a long-time commitment of service to aquaculture that is deemed highly significant and enduring.

**Dr. Avery's** commitment to USAS and WAS spans decades. He is a past president of both USAS and WAS, serves on the USAS elections committee and past presidents committee and has served on the awards and publications committees. He has co-chaired the Catfish Special Session at USAS meetings since 2007.

He is an advisor to many commodity organizations, including Catfish Farmers of America, Catfish Farmers of Mississippi, and Catfish Institute. He has assisted in the formation, organizational procedures, and writing of by-laws for at least four U.S. aquaculture industry groups. He is currently the director of the Southern Regional Aquaculture Center and has served on several USDA aquaculture committees.

A notable moment in his career occurred when the catfish inspection system changed from an FDA-led program to USDA's leadership. **Dr. Avery** arranged educational sessions, farm tours, and processing plant visits to train inspectors. He also led the charge to acquire access for aquaculture producers to traditional agricultural assistance programs through workshops for programs including

the USDA Farm Services Agency Disaster Assistance Program, USDA Farm Services Agency Conservation Reserve Program, 2008 Feed Assistance Program, Trade Adjustment Assistance for Catfish Farmers Program, 2009 Aquaculture Grant Program, Financial Assistance to Catfish Farmers due to Impact of COVID-19, and USDA FSA Emergency Livestock Assistance Program.

The Thad Cochran National Warmwater Aquaculture Center, where **Dr. Avery** has devoted so much of his career, is a part of Delta Research and Extension Center. Established in 1904 with 200 acres, DREC now encompasses nearly 5,000 acres. DREC seeks to increase the yields of commercial agriculture and aquaculture producers while preserving the Mississippi Delta's environment and natural resources.

## USDA ANNOUNCES SIGN-UP FOR NEW RICE PRODUCTION PROGRAM

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that the Farm Service Agency (FSA) will begin sending prefilled applications to rice producers the week of May 8 for the new Rice Production Program (RPP), which will provide up to \$250 million in assistance to rice farmers based on 2022 planted and prevented planted acres.

On Dec. 29, 2022, **President Biden** signed into law H.R. 2617, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, which provided the authority and funding for USDA to make payments to rice producers based on data already on file with USDA, including planted acres and acres prevented from being planted.

"USDA is streamlining the application process for rice producers by mailing a pre-filled application to eligible producers," said **Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack**. "This approach will result in significant time savings for both farmers and USDA employees, helping to ensure the swift delivery of program benefits to producers and further our goal of better serving farmers." For more information, visit the USDA FSA website.

## USDA AGREES TO MISS. LAWMAKERS' REQUEST TO PURCHASE CATFISH PRODUCTS

U.S. Senators **Roger Wicker** and **Cindy Hyde-Smith**, and U.S. Representatives **Steven Palazzo**, **Trent Kelly**, and **Michael Guest** are part of a bicameral coalition that has successfully convinced the U.S. Department of Agriculture to purchase up to \$42 million of catfish products for distribution to various nutrition assistance programs, including charitable institutions. USDA provided

notification of the purchase approval.

U.S. Senators **Roger Wicker** and **Cindy Hyde-Smith**, and U.S. Representatives **Steven Palazzo**, **Trent Kelly**, and **Michael Guest** last November signed a letter that encouraged the Agriculture Secretary to purchase farm-raised catfish through the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Section 32 program, citing hardships facing the U.S. farm-raised catfish industry. Additionally, **Hyde-Smith** and U.S. Senator **Katie Britt** (Ala.) wrote AMS Administrator **Bruce Summers** to further stress the need to approve the Section 32 purchase, stating: "In short, there is more justification today for a sizable USDA Section 32 catfish purchase than when the request was initially delivered to AMS."

## DARRYL EARNEST ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT



**Earnest**

**Darryl Earnest**, who has served as the Deputy Administrator for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) - Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) - Cotton and Tobacco Program (C&T) since 2005, retired April 30, 2023. He has served a total of 33 years in government service, with the last 18 as Deputy Administrator. **Earnest** spent his entire career in the AMS, arriving at USDA in 1990 after graduating college.

"It has been a privilege to serve such a dedicated, united, and persevering industry and all its stakeholders and constituents," said **Earnest**. "Throughout my career, I have been fortunate to work with an outstanding group of talented co-workers and staff who share in the commitment to our mission, the understanding of the importance of our position in the supply chain, and the desire to be the gold standard and best in the world at what we do. I am proud of our team, the accomplishment we've achieved, and the advancements we've made. It has been our ultimate goal to add value to U.S. cotton and its supply chain through our efforts."

Effective May 1, 2023, Associate Deputy Administrators **Ronnie Robbins** and **Monica Alexander** are serving in rotating roles as Acting Deputy Administrators of the AMS Cotton and Tobacco Program. Each will serve 90-day rotations until the Deputy Administrator position is filled, which typically takes several months to complete. Both bring a wealth of experience, knowledge, and dedication to the table and will serve the industry well.

## MSU'S WOMACK CONFIRMED AS STATE CHEMIST BY MISSISSIPPI SENATE



**Mississippi Sen. Rita Potts Parks, left, chairman of the Senate Universities and Colleges Committee, and Sen. Bart Williams congratulate MSU's Erika Womack on her appointment as State Chemist.**

Mississippi State University's **Erika Womack** has been confirmed as the State Chemist by the Mississippi Senate.

With Senate confirmation on March 23rd, **Womack** will continue to lead the Mississippi State Chemical Laboratory, a state agency housed on the MSU campus that provides testing and analysis services on products sold in the state for a wide range of stakeholders. **Womack** joined MSU as director of the lab and interim State Chemist last year.

"I appreciate and share the Senate's confidence in **Dr. Womack** to fulfill these duties and continue the vital operations of the Mississippi State Chemical Lab. Erika and her team work to ensure the integrity of products that we use every day in Mississippi," said MSU Vice President for Research and Economic Development **Julie Jordan**.

Before returning to MSU last fall, **Womack** served as a research laboratory manager in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She is a two-time MSU alumna, earning a doctorate in molecular biology and a bachelor's degree in biological sciences. She also earned a master's degree in biomedical sciences from Mississippi College.

"It is a privilege to accept this position and an honor to have been entrusted with this role as the State Chemist of Mississippi," **Womack** said. "I am excited for the opportunity to lead this team of efficient and professional staff at the Mississippi State Chemical Laboratory, an organization with a reputation of excellence as a regulatory agency and fee-for-service analytical testing of agricultural products. I plan to preserve MSCL's established relationships as well as cultivate new relationships within the regulatory and agribusiness communities."

The MSCL works in cooperation with the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce to develop regulations for and conduct analysis of animal feeds, fertilizers,



# AROUND DELTA FIELDS

pesticides, agricultural limes and petroleum products sold in the state. It also assures the quality of retail foods, fuels, livestock feeds, crop protection products and more.

## DELTA STATE'S UNIVERSITY POLICE CHIEF JEFF JOHNS ELECTED TO AN INTERNATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT LEADERSHIP POSITION

Delta State University Police Chief **Jeffrey D. Johns (Jeff)** has been installed as General Chair, University & College Section, for the International Association of Chiefs of Police. **Johns** was elected in 2019 to serve as Vice-Chair under Chief **James Lyons** of Augusta University (Ga.). **Chief Johns** transitioned to General Chair during the recent 2022 IACP Annual Conference and Exposition in Dallas, Tex.



**Johns**

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) is the world's largest and most influential professional association for police leaders. With more than 32,000 members in over 170 countries, the IACP is a recognized leader in global policing, committed to advancing safer communities through thoughtful, progressive police leadership. Since 1893, the association has been serving communities by speaking out on behalf of law enforcement and advancing leadership and professionalism in policing worldwide.

**Johns** will serve a two-year term under newly revised bylaws creating three successive vice-chairs leading to the General Chair seat. He is the first Mississippi University Police Chief to hold the Section General Chair position. **Johns** has served as Director of the Delta State University Department of Campus Safety & University Police since 2016. Before his appointment at DSU, he spent ten years with the Holmes Community College District Police Department as Director of Public Safety/Chief of Police. He is the immediate past president and former Vice-President of the MS Campus Law Enforcement Association and currently represents MSCLEA on the Mississippi Accreditation Commission. **Johns** has previously served as Deputy Sheriff in two Mississippi Sheriff's Departments and has three decades of public service.

"IACP has molded my vision of what being a police chief entails and has been a great value to my career," **Johns** said. "I am humbled and honored to be elected by university and college chief peers to this position."

## FREEZE JOINS MDCC AS VICE PRESIDENT OF WORKFORCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mississippi Delta Community College (MDCC) has named a new Vice President of Workforce and Economic Development in **Douglas Freeze**.



**Freeze**

**Freeze** comes to MDCC from Northwest Mississippi Community College, where he served as director of workforce solutions and community services.

A veteran of the Mississippi community college system, **Freeze** has served in several capacities over the past 12 years and has worked in higher education for almost 20 years.

**Freeze** is thrilled to become a part of MDCC and is ready to get to work serving both the college and its surrounding community.

"I am beyond excited to join the MDCC family. The outflowing of support by everyone during this transition period has been amazing, and I am fortunate to have an excellent Workforce Education team at the Capps Center," said **Freeze**. "All of the key pieces are in place so we can help our communities to dream big, plan well, and be anything!"

MDCC President **Dr. Tyrone Jackson** is similarly excited about having someone with **Freeze's** experience to lead workforce and economic development at MDCC.

"I'm very proud to welcome **Mr. Freeze** as our new Vice President of Workforce and Economic Development," said **Jackson**. "With his abundance of experience and educational background, there is no doubt in my mind that he will be a valuable asset to MDCC and the Delta. We look forward to the great work he will do as part of the MDCC family."

"This is such a critical position for our communities, businesses, and individuals in the Mississippi Delta, and we were blessed with some top-notch candidates," said **Floyd Melton**, a Delta Council leader from Greenwood who served on the interview panel. "However, **Doug Freeze** stood out with his experience and enthusiasm, and we are very fortunate that he has accepted the Capps Center position."

## SMITH ANNOUNCED AS MS COMMUNITY COLLEGE BOARD DIRECTOR

The Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB) has unanimously selected **Mr. Kell Smith** to serve as the agency's sixth Executive Director. He has been with the agency since May 2008, most recently serving

as Interim Executive Director since July 2021. He previously served as Director of Communications and Legislative Services for the MCCB.

"I am very appreciative of the trust and confidence the board has placed in me. Mississippi's community colleges are among our state's greatest resources. I look forward to working with each of them to help ensure they have the tools and resources needed to serve their students," said **Mr. Smith**.



**Smith**

Director. During his time at MCCB, he has been a part of helping promote the system across the state. His leadership will be an asset to the agency and to the community colleges."

"The MCCB is a valuable partner of the community system. Since 2008, **Kell** has worked tirelessly to better each of our institutions. We look forward to continuing working with him in this new position as we all strive to better Mississippi," said **Dr. Valmadge Towner**, President of Coahoma Community College and Chair of the Mississippi Association of Community Colleges.

"**Kell** is a native of Greenville and a steadfast advocate for our community college system and workforce training in particular," said **Frank Howell**, Delta Council staff person. "Delta Council is excited about **Kell's** appointment, and we look forward to continuing our friendship and work."

**Kell** attended Mississippi State University, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and also earned a Masters of Public Policy and Administration.

## JOHNSON DISCUSSES NEED FOR FARM BILL SAFETY NET IMPROVEMENTS BEFORE SENATE AG PANEL



FARM BILL & SUBSIDY POLICY  
**PATRICK JOHNSON**  
National Cotton Council  
Director

The hearing, which was split into two panels, featured leaders from two general farm organizations as well as ten commodity

organizations. One theme became evident from the hearing – U.S. farmers need an improved safety net.

Delta Council Executive Committee Chairman and Tunica producer **Patrick Johnson** testified on May 2, 2023, during a hearing held by the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Subcommittee on Commodities, Risk Management, and Trade. **Johnson**, Producer Director of the National Cotton Council and Chair of the American Cotton Producers Farm Policy Task Force, discussed increased production costs, sluggish consumer demand, and supply chain disruptions while advocating for more resources to update the Agricultural Risk Coverage, Price Loss Coverage, and crop insurance programs to meet existing and future challenges facing U.S. agricultural production.

## CAPITOL RESOURCES EXPANDS FEDERAL TEAM

Capitol Resources LLC is expanding its federal lobbying and public affairs practice by adding **Josh Peaster** to the firm's experienced team. **Josh** has over five years of Senate staff experience, working most recently as a Legislative Assistant for U.S. Senator **Cindy Hyde-Smith** and previously in the offices of U.S. Senate Majority Leader **Mitch McConnell** (KY) and U.S. Senator **Thad Cochran**.



**Peaster**

**Peaster** worked on a myriad of issues during his time in the U.S. Senate, including managing appropriation requests and policy recommendations and led policy efforts on legislation pertaining to financial services, economic development, small business, housing, labor, and agriculture.

"**Josh** is going to do great at Capitol Resources; he has learned a ton working on the Hill about issues and process. He never meets a stranger, so he knows just about everyone on the Senate side along with anyone who came calling on his bosses," said managing partner **Henry Barbour**. "Not only will he be an asset to our federal efforts, but he will also work closely with our sister firm, BullsEye Public Affairs on corporate public affairs projects."

"I'm thrilled to be a part of the Capitol Resources team," said **Peaster**. "I want to apply what I have learned these last five years and especially help Mississippi clients succeed in Washington. I look forward to helping grow our federal practice and working with the entire Capitol Resources lobbying team across the South."

"**Josh** has been an invaluable member of Senator **Cindy-Hyde Smith's** team in Washington and a real friend to agriculture in the Delta," said Delta Council President **Wade Litton**.

## ASA HONORS WILLARD JACK, MS, WITH PINNACLE AWARD

The American Soybean Association recognized **Willard Jack**, retired ASA director and soy farmer from Belzoni, Mississippi, with its top honor during an awards ceremony at Commodity Classic in Orlando.

The Pinnacle Award is an industry-wide recognition of a lifetime of work that demonstrates the highest level of contribution and leadership within the soybean family and industry.

Throughout a farming career spanning 50 years and two countries, **Willard Jack** has been a strong proponent of embracing new technology and practices, using sustainable farming methods, expanding U.S. soy markets, and advocating for sound ag policy on Capitol Hill.

From a farming partnership in Ontario, Canada, **Jack** and his wife, **Laura Lee**, moved to Mississippi in 1979 and launched a diversified row crop operation. **Jack's** work has been recognized by numerous farming awards, including "Outstanding Soybean Producer" from Delta Council in 1990.

**Jack** has been an active member of the Mississippi Soybean Association since the early 1990s. At that time, he chaired a committee to



**Jack**

adopt and promote an updated seed law in Mississippi, which led to the state's current law. He was also instrumental in development of the Mississippi Agricultural Liming Materials Act of 1993.

As an ASA director from 2015 to 2022, **Jack** spent many hours discussing important soy policy issues with members of Congress in Washington, D.C. He is an avid believer in the power of soybean farmers to impact policies that benefit the entire industry.

**Jack's** knowledge of political action committees and active role in planning and preparing for ASA's PAC meetings were assets to the ASA board and contributed to many successful SoyPAC meetings and events.

During his time with ASA, **Jack** was committed to promoting the quality and uses of U.S. soybeans in foreign markets, traveling to Morocco, Nepal, China, France, and Belgium to speak with customers abroad.

**Jack's** well-earned knowledge of farming practices, the quality of U.S. soybeans and the uses of soybeans, along with his dedication and advocacy skills, have helped strengthen the U.S. soybean industry, grow soybean export markets and lay the path for future generations of leaders.

## BURCH ANNOUNCED AS NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF WCEA

**Justin Archer Burch** has been named the new executive director of the Washington County Economic Alliance. **Burch** is a nationally known community and economic developer whom for the last six years has served as the economic development director for Rural Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) across all 50 states and two U.S. territories. **Burch** is a native Mississippian and a graduate of the University of Mississippi.

"We are fortunate to have Justin **Burch** join the Washington County Economic Alliance (WCEA) as our executive director," said **Parker England**, Chairman of the WCEA. "With his wealth of experience, proven record of leadership, and passion for the Mississippi Delta, **Justin** is a natural fit to lead the WCEA. We have full confidence that the WCEA will thrive under **Justin's** leadership and, by extension, so will Washington County."

**Burch** holds credentials from Harvard



**Burch**

University in Leadership Management, Princeton University in Domestic Policy, the Lily Family School at Purdue University in Nonprofit Management, the University of Tennessee in Strategic Planning for Economic Development, and is a graduate of both the Community Development Institute at the University of Central Arkansas and the Economic Development Institute at the University of Oklahoma.

Prior to joining Rural LISC, **Burch** was the program director of the Delta Regional Authority covering all eight Delta states for the Federal Economic Development Commission and was the director of Community Development at the Foundation for the Mid South which covers Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

**Justin Archer Burch** will begin his new role on June 1st and will be joined by his wife, **Cameryn Miller Burch**, and their two children.

## WICKER, HYDE-SMITH ANNOUNCE \$35.2 MILLION FOR MS AIRPORTS

U.S. Senators **Roger Wicker** and **Cindy Hyde-Smith** announced the award of almost \$35.2 million in Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) grants for airport improvement throughout Mississippi.

The 39 grant awards were made through the long-running Airport Improvement Program (AIP) and the newer Airport Improvement Grant (AIG) program. Several of the AIG grants are designed complement AIP grants.

"These grants are direct investments in safety and economic development in Mississippi," **Wicker** said. "I have been a strong supporter of infrastructure, especially for airports, because they are a critical component of our economy. This funding will help airports across our state make the improvements they need to keep contributing and protect the flying public."

"The importance of local airports to the overall vitality and growth of communities cannot be overstated. These FAA awards will support important projects and upgrades to improve safety and efficiency at airports across Mississippi," said **Hyde-Smith**, ranking member on the Senate Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Subcommittee.

The 22 AIP grants, which total \$24.99 million, include these Delta locations:

- Olive Branch/Taylor Field Airport, Olive Branch – \$2,156,050 to reconstruct runway and taxiway lighting, and airfield guidance signs.
- Yazoo County Airport, Yazoo City – \$700,000 to rehabilitate runway and taxiway lighting and reconstruct an airport beacon.
- Fletcher Field Airport, Clarksdale – \$469,710 to expand apron.

- C A Moore Airport, Lexington – \$315,990 to construct, extend, or improve safety area.
  - Greenwood-Leflore Airport, Carroll County – \$150,000 to rehabilitate runway.
  - Indianola Municipal Airport, Indianola – \$150,000 to seal taxiway pavement surface and pavement joints.
  - Greenville Mid-Delta Airport, Greenville – \$144,400 to conduct or update a study.
  - Vicksburg Municipal Airport, Vicksburg – \$100,800 to acquire land for development.
- The 17 AIG grants, which total \$10.2 million, include:

- Olive Branch/Taylor Field Airport, Olive Branch – \$587,000 for rehabilitating 12,000 square yards of the existing T-Hangar apron.
- Greenville Mid-Delta Airport, Greenville – \$570,000 for funding the design phase of a project to improve 3,500 feet of the Taxiway B drainage system and rehabilitating 110,000 square yards of the north apron.
- Greenwood-Leflore Airport, Greenwood – \$534,556 for acquiring a new emergency generator and rehabilitating 6,501 feet of Runway 18/36.
- Vicksburg Municipal Airport, Vicksburg – \$270,000 for rehabilitating 2,650 square yards of the existing apron pavement and performing crack repair and joint filling to 5,001 feet of the existing Runway 1/19 surface.
- C A Moore Airport, Lexington – \$126,000 for updating the airport master plan narrative report and airport layout plan.
- Panola County Airport, Batesville – \$108,090 for funding the design phase of constructing a 6,900 square yard general aviation apron.

## DELTA COUNCIL OFFICERS AND PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTEES MEET IN STONEVILLE



(From L to R) **Thomas Neblett, Patrick Martin, Julia Clark, Andrew Wilbourn, Will Boggan, Clifton Thach, Kay Whittington (at podium)**

On Friday, February 3, Delta Council Officers and Presidential Appointees met in Stoneville for an update on current issues and activities in the area. Delta Council President **Wade Litton** opened the meeting, followed by an update on the alluvial aquifer project from **Kay Whittington**, Director of the Office of Land

and Water Resources from the MS Department of Environmental Quality. **Dr. Butch Caston**, Interim President of Delta State University, gave the group an update on DSU, followed by a report on Delta Wildlife nuisance control activities by **Jody Acosta**, Program Manager.



## EPA AND CORPS *from page 1*

Federal agreements including compensatory mitigation planning.

The proposed plan would manage backwater flooding seasonally. The agencies worked with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and MS Agriculture Commission to understand the primary crops, crop seasons, days to reach maturity, and field preparation methods in the South Delta. The research showed soybeans, field corn, and cotton are the primary crops to be protected, and the estimated crop season for the pumps to actuate is March 25 through October 31 at the 2-year floodplain level of 90'. From November 1 through March 24, the non-crop season, the pump would be actuated at the 5-year floodplain level of 93'.

"This is an answer to a promise that was made over eighty years ago," said **Paul Hollis**, Delta Council Past President, MS Levee Board Commissioner, and South Delta producer. "For those of us who live in the South Delta, it gives us hope that we have had before but was never followed through with. Having both the EPA and the Corps of Engineers working in the same room to come up with a comprehensive plan is unprecedented. This plan covers all the elements of environmental justice, environmental impacts, and flood control. This is truly a plan that has studied the science from all aspects. All of us who have suffered for so many years are grateful to **Senator Roger Wicker, Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith, Congressman Bennie Thompson**, EPA, and the Corp of Engineers for giving us a plan that meets all the challenges and requirements of the Yazoo Backwater Area."

There were multiple presentation sessions held over the two days. The first session was held Thursday morning at the Theodore Roosevelt National Wildlife Refuge in Onward, where long-time Eagle Lake resident **Ken Klaus** was in attendance. "This is, I think, the first time we've heard something so positive, that we have a project that's been worked on by both sides," **Klaus** said to the panel. "And you've come together and brought something to us, for us — not only us, but for the wildlife and the agriculture. This is really exceptional."

The additional meetings were held Thursday afternoon and evening and Friday at the Vicksburg District Corps building. On the presenting panel were **Michael Connor, Jeaneanne Gettle, Stacey Jensen, Brian Frazer**, and **Matt Strickler**, along

with a host of representatives from other Federal agencies lining the walls of the room at the Corps facility. There were also a large number of South Delta residents and other regional and State-wide proponents of the Pumps in attendance who thanked the panel for their timely and dedicated work toward a flood solution.

"Science matters. We put together a plan amongst the resource agencies and the Army Corps of Engineers that we think protects the interests that have been long at issue, which are the fish and wildlife resources and the wetland resources," **Connor** said. "I haven't seen any of the statements, but this is a science-based, technical plan intended to address the issues."

"We can give thanks that the Army Corps, EPA, and other agencies kept their promise to go back to the drawing board and come up with a plan they all agree on," **U.S. Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith** said in a press statement. "I am excited to say we are stepping onto new ground. After a lot of time, hard work, stakeholder meetings, and many trips to the South Delta, the Corps and cooperating Federal agencies support a single path forward. There is a long road ahead in terms of planning, design, funding, and construction of the pumping stations, but I am committed to doing everything I can to move this plan forward. Mississippians deserve this, and have for quite some time."

"This is a great announcement. It's a major step forward for South Delta residents who have been waiting decades for the Federal government to keep its promise, and also, to protect them from flooding," **U.S. Senator Roger Wicker** said. "This water management plan would help prevent nearly all the flooding that has destroyed homes and businesses, ruined crops, and devastated wildlife. Also, this new plan would not have been possible without Federal officials hearing firsthand from the many South Delta residents who have shared their unfiltered stories of hardship and loss and frustration. I encourage all Mississippians who have been affected, who are interested in this issue, to continue sharing their stories and feedback on this proposal."

This proposed plan differs from the previously approved, then vetoed, plan of a 14,000 CFS pumping station actuated at 87', regardless of the season, which would alleviate flooding of all homes. The current proposed actuated pumping level would leave approximately two dozen homes projected to be inundated at the 90' level. "If you look at those two dozen, 17 approximately already

have some sort of floodproofing, but (partner agencies) would add to that if necessary," EPA Yazoo Technical Lead **Laura Shumway** said. "So, you're talking about approximately seven houses at that point. This was all conducted through windshield surveys."

In comparison to the effects of the 2019 flood, the pumps, even at the proposed 90' actuation point, would have saved 620 homes.

Also, in comparison to the 2019 flood, 548,000 acres of land were flooded for up to 7 months. Of these, 109,000 acres were cropland. The new proposed plan would allow 12,952 acres of farmland to flood before the pumps would turn on, allowing 96,048 acres to continue to be planted and harvested by small local farming operations that are the base of the South Delta economy.

"The community was delighted with the new plan, but they have asked the Federal agencies to go back and look to see if they could lower the pump-on elevations and start the crop season earlier in March," explained MS Levee Board Vice-President **Nott Wheeler**, "The original plan for the Yazoo Backwater Project called for a 25,000 cfs pump that turned on at 80'. We acknowledge that we have to compromise to get this project built - but our people have given up 10' to 13' of protection for the environment."

"The Yazoo Backwater Project Proposal presentation was a great day for the Finish the Pumps grassroots campaign, as well as a needed injection of hope for the battered South Delta," said Finish the Pumps board member and South Delta resident **Anne Dahl**. "In my opinion, the EPA has taken the courageous step to admit that they had it wrong for the last 15 years. They are finally cutting through the politics and outside pressure and, as they stated yesterday, are now "following the science" and ensuring they are complying with the Clean Water Act and any other policies and procedures."

These May sessions are followed by a series of community engagement sessions in Vicksburg lasting ten hours on February 15, 2023. Attending this meeting were also **Michael Connor**, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works; **Jeaneanne Gettle**, Director of the Water Division, Region 4 for the EPA; **Stacey Jensen**, the Acting Director of Policy and Legislation in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works; and **Brian Frazer**, Director of the Oceans, Wetlands and Communities Division, EPA. The panel listened intently to dozens of first-hand accounts from South Deltans and proponents of the Pumps and

took into account their information and comments to formulate the new proposed project that is now on the table.

## THE CORPS AND EPA ESTABLISHED AN AGGRESSIVE FIVE-MONTH TIMELINE IN A JANUARY 9, 2023, JOINT MEMORANDUM

### JANUARY

- Joint Army-EPA Collaboration Memorandum in place
- Establish external engagement strategy
- Project delivery team identified

### FEBRUARY

- Deliver agreed-upon process to establish scope of wetland impacts
- Finalize criteria for any compensatory mitigation needed for a future project
- Initiate external engagement

### MARCH

- Mapping products delivered
- Deliver agreed-upon wetland functional assessment criteria

### APRIL

- Stakeholder engagement on preliminary findings recommendation

### MAY

- Synthesize analysis and stakeholder feedback into a recommendation

### JUNE

- Army delivers preferred approach(es) for flood risk reduction solution(s) for the Yazoo Backwater Area

**COMMENT CARDS** were made available at the community engagement sessions for feedback from the public, but there is also an online project comment section available at <https://www.mvk.usace.army.mil/Missions/Programs-and-Project-Management/Yazoo-Backwater/>.

You can also visit [mvk.usace.army.mil](https://www.mvk.usace.army.mil) and click the red banner at the top of that page that says "Visit the Yazoo Backwater Project Page" to review the presentation and submit a comment.

# Delta Council

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## MISSISSIPPI DELTA BANKS CREATE FUND FOR REBUILDING

On Friday, March 24, a devastating string of storms hit Mississippi, resulting in at least 23 deaths, and as of early Monday morning, there were still 24,387 power outages remaining across 16 counties as a result of Friday's storm.

In an effort to help the victims of these deadly tornadoes, Bank of Anguilla, BankPlus, CB&S Bank, Cleveland State Bank, Community Bank, Guaranty Bank, Planters Bank, Renasant Bank, Southern Bancorp, and Trustmark have each committed \$10,000 to begin relief efforts for Delta communities in a fund called The Heart of the Delta Foundation.

"These community banks in the Delta are committed to rebuilding, and they realize

the road will be long. The MBA is happy to support their efforts leading to recovery and we're proud of the strong example of community shown here. We encourage banks throughout Mississippi and the nation to join us. We are also in discussion with bankers in other impacted parts of the state as well about how the fund can be helpful to them, too," said **Gordon Fellows**, Mississippi Bankers Association [MBA] President and CEO.

The Federal Home Loan Bank of Dallas has also pledged to match up to \$250,000 in donations made to the Foundation. The Heart of the Delta Foundation will work closely with local organizations and community leaders to

determine how to appropriate funds where they are needed most.

Banks and individuals are invited to contribute to this fund. For individuals who would like to contribute, check with your local bank about making a donation to The Heart of the Delta Foundation. For any banks that would like to contribute, please contact **Gordon Fellows** at the Mississippi Bankers Association.

Additionally, the MBA will work with other local Mississippi groups as well to help ensure funding for rebuilding efforts is as thorough and widespread as possible. The MBA will also work with the American Bankers Association

[ABA] Foundation, and the Independent Community Bankers of America [ICBA] Foundation to generate national fundraising support. Both foundations will direct funding to different areas of need. For more information or to contribute to the ICBA foundation, visit [icba.org](http://icba.org). For more information about the ABA Foundation, visit [aba.com/donaterelief](http://aba.com/donaterelief).

Contributions to the Heart of the Delta Foundation can be mailed to: The Heart of the Delta Foundation, P O Box 145, Belzoni, MS 39038. An online donation option will be coming soon. For updates and links to contribute to recovery efforts, visit [www.msbankers.com/tornado-relief](http://www.msbankers.com/tornado-relief).

