

Corps prepares to link West Bank levees

4-mile stretch to river would be last segment of 66-mile chain

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The Army Corps of Engineers is close to finalizing plans to tie the West Bank hurricane protection system into the Mississippi River levee, the last link in a 66-mile chain of levees and floodwalls protecting parts of Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines and St. Charles parishes.

Called the Western Tie-In, the new 4-mile levee will connect the Lake Cataouatche levee south of Waggaman to the Mississippi levee near Ama in St. Charles Parish, following the contour of the Davis Pond Freshwater Diversion Project.

Plans call for a section of U.S. 90 west of the Jefferson-St. Charles Parish line to be raised over a new floodwall, preserving the highway as a key evacuation route.

Floodgates would be built across Bayou Vincent and at two sets of railroad tracks.

Most of the new levees and floodwalls would be built to 15.5 feet above sea level to guard against a storm with a 1 percent chance of hitting in any given year. As a point of reference, U.S. 90 is about 6 feet above sea level.

Corps officials said they decided to build the new levee on the south side of the Outer Cataouatche Canal, which parallels U.S. 90, to spare a handful of homes and a business between the canal and the highway.

A preliminary environmental report found that the project would require filling 204 acres of wetlands.

A full report on the project's environmental and human impacts is expected to be released in a couple of months, said Gib Owen, chief of the corps' ecological planning and restoration section. After the report's release, officials will set a timeline for bids and construction.

Owen said the corps had hoped to release the report earlier, but it has been delayed as engineers determine what type of floodgate to build across Bayou Vincent to minimize the impact on 2,000 acres of wetlands that are hydrologically connected to the bayou.

The new levee is designed to protect the western end of West Jefferson and a sliver of eastern St. Charles Parish from storm surge coming up the Barataria Basin through Lakes Cataouatche and Salvador.

A video showing the three options studied by the corps can be viewed at www.mvn.usace.army.mil/hps2/videos/tiein/tiein_video.asp

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