

Corps of Engineers approves levee clay borrow sites in Plaquemines, St. Charles and Ascension parishes

By: Mark Schleifstein, The Times-Picayune
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Army Corps of Engineers' engineer Peter Vo climbs up from the bottom of a borrow pit in eastern St. Bernard Parish off of Highway 46 in 2008.

The Army Corps of Engineers has approved seven more privately-owned borrow sites from which clay can be purchased to build area levees.

The sites were chosen after a review of the environmental effects of the potential removal of the material and the quality of the clay. The clay must meet new quality standards set in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The corps estimates it will need 80 million cubic yards of clay to complete its raising of the regional levee system to protect from storm surge caused by a hurricane with a 1 percent chance of occurring in any year, also known as a 100-year storm. To date, it has approved potential sources of clay that hold an estimated 170 million cubic yards of suitable material. Approval of this set of clay sites was conditioned on the signing of a decision record by Col. Alvin Lee, commander of the corps' New Orleans District office. In support of the decision, the corps has published Individual Environmental Report 32, which was released for public review in November.

The decision record and final copy of the report are available on the Web at www.nolaenvironmental.gov .

The approved clay sites include:

- Bocage Plantation, Ascension Parish
- Citrus Lands, Plaquemines Parish
- ConocoPhillips, Plaquemines Parish
- Idlewood Stage 1, Plaquemines Parish
- Nairn site, Plaquemines Parish
- Plaquemines Dirt & Clay, Plaquemines Parish
- 3C Riverside Phase 3 site, St. Charles Parish.

The owners of those sites were responsible for the soil boring and testing data provided to the corps, and also had to obtain state and federal environmental clearances. Once approved, the site is available to contractors for purchase of clay they may need to complete construction of levee segments. The corps does not enter into any purchase agreements with the borrow pit operators, and there's no guarantee by the corps that contractors will buy their material. Questions about the borrow site approvals can be directed to Patricia Leroux at the corps, 862.1544 or by e-mail at mvnenvironmental@usace.army.mil.