

Mississippi's Lower Delta Partnership

June 2011

P.O. Box 214, Rolling Fork, MS 39159 www.lowerdelta.org

Great Flood of 2011

2011 has been a year of disasters and it's only half over. Many areas of the country have been affected by weather related incidents. The disaster that impacted people living in the Lower Delta was the Mississippi River and related backwater "Great Flood of 2011." Some of the highest recorded river levels in history have been established with this year's flood. Delta Council estimates that the total acres in the South Delta impacted by the flood is 215,000 acres, and the number of crop acres affected in Issaquena, Warren, Sharkey and Yazoo Counties is approximately 68,000.

While not quite the 1937 level of 48.7 feet, the Mississippi River crested in Memphis at 47.8 feet on May 10; in Greenville on May 16 at 64.2; and in Vicksburg on May 19 at 57.1. It was not just mainline Mississippi River flooding that affected the Delta. In 1973 much of the South Delta suffered from backwater flooding, but since that time the Yazoo Backwater Levee has been constructed, and in 2011, it did what it was designed to do, saving many homes and a great deal of cropland. While predicted to overtop when the river at Vicksburg reached 56.2, this prediction was proven incorrect. Water did come within inches, but even when the river crested at 57.1, the backwater levee did not overtop, protecting a great deal of the South Delta. Areas unprotected by the backwater levee, such as parts of Yazoo County, suffered extensive flooding of homes, roadways and cropland, even more so than in 1973.

Throughout this flood, we have witnessed incredible efforts by the Army Corps of Engineers, the Levee Boards and local governments. As many have testified, the impacts of this flood could have been so much worse, but thanks to the diligence of these groups, the levees were monitored and any sandboils or slides were attended to quickly and efficiently. City and county officials had plans in place so both citizens and governmental records would be protected should anything happen. In addition to those, many local institutions such as hospitals, nursing homes, libraries and private businesses learned what to do should the worst happen. Kudos to each of these individuals and organizations.



Much Anticipated South Delta Interpretive Center Funding Rescinded

Public Law 108-199 was passed as a part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2004 authorizing a “Multi-agency Wildlife and Environmental Interpretive and Education Center be located in the South Delta area of the state at a site to be determined by a site selection and feasibility study conducted by the Secretary of the Army.”

The US Army Corps of Engineers conducted extensive studies on 74 sites in the South Delta as a part of its site selection and feasibility study. After all was said and done, the site that ranked highest was the “Red Barn” site on the south end of Rolling Fork. The citizens of Sharkey County have been extremely excited anticipating this center and the opportunities it would bring to the area. However, On April 15, the FY 2011 Department of Defense and Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act rescinded funding for the center.

What is so heartbreaking about the rescission is the fact that the Corps had already purchased the property, conducted environmental reviews (that became complicated because of the rich archaeological findings on site), worked out tribal agreements consenting to construction on the site, designed the building and proposed displays. The next step was advertising for construction bids. There is little optimism that funding for the center will be restored, but all Sharkey countians and friends are encouraged to write their congressmen requesting that it is.



2009 photo—Natalie Perkins

The historic Red Barn was located on the site chosen for the Interpretive Center but the Corps did not feel that it was feasible to remodel it for the Interpretive Center, instead they designed a new facility to be built on the south side of the barn. It was hoped the barn would be incorporated into future exhibits for the center.

Now it appears neither structure will be located on the site.



Preliminary design for the proposed South Delta Interpretive Center

On April 30, 2011 Rolling Fork lost its Landmark Red Barn—reprinted below is the article that Ray Mosby wrote for the Deer Creek Pilot following its collapse.

The Red Barn Collapses

There have been a lot of appropriate words used for years to describe Rolling Fork's "Red Barn," words like "landmark" and "iconic," but today words like "shame" and "tragedy" seem even more appropriate. Sometime in the pre-dawn hours Saturday, the structure whose architecture was such as to be rarely seen outside the Midwest, the structure that had stood at this town's southern limits since 1918, collapsed inward, upon itself.

That which the Graft family constructed and that which had so long been associated with Rolling Fork—even before there was the Teddy Bear, there was The Red Barn—is today a twisted heap of tin and cypress..

Bad news travels fast in a small town and by mid-morning a large crowd had gathered along U.S. 61 here, cars lined along the highway not unlike the string of vehicles one sees at a cemetery, their occupants sadly staring at what used to be, their faces reflective of those at a body's viewing. Consistent with the metaphor and with the cooperation of the local flower shop, a black wreath was hung on the fence surrounding the property.

In a press release later that day, the Corps of Engineers, which now owns that property, said that its south wall collapsed, causing the roof to then collapse. The Corps said, "Recent high winds and bad weather unfortunately impacted the structural integrity of the barn." That statement also warned of "unknown hazards" and stressed that "trespassing on the property is strictly forbidden."

On April 15, the Sharkey County Historic Preservation Commission wrote the Corps a letter, which said, among other things: "Last summer grass grew around the barn over 2 feet high and vines grew up the sides of the barn encouraging deterioration and damage by pests and animals. During a storm this winter, some of the tin on roof was damaged leaving the barn exposed to the elements. The roof is still in this condition. Although the barn has not been used for many years, the previous owners and

renters of the property did keep a roof on it, keep up with simple maintenance and maintain the surrounding property, as this is the southern entrance to our community and it used to be quite picturesque."

Used to be, indeed.



2008 photo—Jennifer Baughn,



April 30, 2011—Becky Harris Photography



April 30, 2011—Becky Harris Photography

Those Pesky Buffalo Gnats!

Wow – the Great Flood of 2011 in and of itself was a traumatic and nerve racking time for most of us in the Lower Delta. But to add a little indignity and insult were those atrocious little black flies, aka Buffalo Gnats, Turkey Gnats and White Socks. The bites hurt, itched, swelled and stayed with us for weeks on end. We heard that the secret to keeping them at bay was vanilla extract or dryer sheets and the treatment - cider vinegar and cortisone.

The tiny, unwelcomed critters are of the insect family Simuliidae. There are over 1800 known species of black flies and eleven of these are extinct.

Buffalo gnats are usually not a problem in Mississippi, but every so many years outbreaks are reported. The last couple of years there have been numerous reports of buffalo gnats attacking chickens in Wilkinson, Amite, Issaquena and Warren counties. Mississippi has at least two pest buffalo gnat species – the southern buffalo gnat, *Cnephia pecuarum* and the turkey gnat, *Simulium meridionale*.

Flood water is probably responsible for us having such a problem with these gnats this year because females will only lay their eggs in running water. Each female will lay 150 -450 eggs which then hatch from 4 to 30 days depending on species and temperature. The larvae period may be as short as 2 weeks and larvae development only occurs when there is running water or sufficient movement to accelerate oxygenation of the water. Pupation takes place on rocks in the water with each larva spinning a basket-shaped cocoon open at the downstream end. When the adult emerges, it floats to the surface in a bubble of air and quickly flies away. Mating occurs in swarms or on the ground near the emergence site. Both males and females feed on nectar and most females require a blood meal for development of the eggs.

Adults are often found 7 to 15 miles from the nearest breeding area, but wind-aided migration of 90 to 150 miles has been reported. The worst of the gnat problem seems to be gone for now and all we can say is - Good riddance!!!



E-Cycling

On June 17, 2011, Mississippi's Lower Delta Partnership along with the City of Rolling Fork and the Sharkey Issaquena 4H Clubs sponsored an Electronic Recycling Day.

Individuals and businesses in the community took advantage of this opportunity to responsibly dispose of old computer monitors and components, televisions, radios, telephones, stereos, fax machines and other electronic items. The 8,195 pounds of collected goods were trucked by Advantage E-Cycling of Pearl, Mississippi to their warehouse where they will be sorted, shredded and melted for recycling.



Upcoming Calendar Dates

July 12 – Lower Delta Talk – Malcolm White with “How Hot Tamales came to Mississippi”

July 16 - NABA Butterfly count – Delta National Forest, call the LDP office if you are interested in participating – 662-873-6261

July 29 – American Cancer Society, Relay for Life - Mini Relay in Rolling Fork 7 - 10 p.m.

August 5 - 7 – Mississippi Wildlife Federation's Wildlife Extravaganza – The Trademart Building, Jackson, MS

August 9-11 – Miss-Lou Rural Tourism Summit – Oak Grove, Louisiana

August 16 – Lower Delta Talk – Christopher Koppel with “The Archaeology of the Red Barn Site in Rolling Fork”

September 20 – Lower Delta Talk – Martha Foose with “A Southerly Course: Traveling Foodways Close to Home”

September 24 – LDP and Delta National Forest host the Blue Lake Fishing Rodeo at Blue Lake Recreation Area in Delta National Forest. For Youth up to age 16, bring your own pole!

October 18 – Lower Delta Talk – Hank Burdine with “The Great Flood of 2011”

October 21- Great Delta Bear Affair Youth Education Day

October 22 – The Tenth Annual Great Delta Bear Affair! Downtown Rolling Fork.

November 15 – Lower Delta Talk – Willy Bearden with “Saints and Sinners: People Who made the Delta the Delta”



Flood Pictures



Warning from MDEQ regarding fishing in flood waters

Anyone thinking about fishing these areas needs to be aware of the following issues:

- Floodwaters may have strong currents and unseen hazards under the surface of the water.
- Floodwaters often have high levels of bacteria as a result of flooded sewage systems and the decay of plant and animals that have been killed during the flood.
- Floodwaters may contain oil, gas, diesel, fertilizers or other chemicals.

While there is no data showing that fish from the floodwaters are unsafe to eat, people should use common sense and observe the following precautions:

- Don't eat fish or crawfish that come out of an oil, gas or diesel slick.
- Don't eat fish or crawfish that don't look normal. For example, fish with sores, tumors, or discoloration.
- Don't eat fish or crawfish that don't act normally. For example, fish that are gasping for breath at the surface, swimming erratically, or that are dead or dying.
- Don't eat fish or crawfish that smell unusual--such as sewage, diesel or chemical odor.
- If they taste funny, throw them out.
- Handle fish and crawfish from floodwaters carefully. Avoid hand to mouth, nose or eye contact and wash hands thoroughly after handling uncooked fish or crawfish from flooded areas.
- Cook fish and crawfish thoroughly to kill any bacteria that may be present.