

# LEVEE SPONSOR NEWSLETTER

A COMPILATION OF GOOD THINGS HAPPENING FOR LEVEES IN THE  
US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS - ST. LOUIS DISTRICT



## SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE FIELD

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### NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

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### Grand Tower & Degognia Levee: SWIF to Success

The Grand Tower and Degognia/Fountain Bluff levee system is a federally built, mostly agricultural levee located in southern Illinois, along the Mississippi and Big Muddy rivers. The nearly 37-mile-long system has many features including more than 30 gravity drains, multiple pump stations, miles of seepage berms, and hundreds of relief wells. Any levee sponsor understands that maintaining a levee of this size and complexity is no small feat. Trying to keep up with the complex and often very costly operations and maintenance requirements of a levee system is a challenge, as it is for many levee districts.

In 2011, a periodic inspection of the Grand Tower and Degognia/Fountain Bluff levee system revealed several issues. Gravity drains were aging, and their internal conditions were not verified. Relief well repairs and rehabilitation had been delayed for several years, and slides were present in several areas. As a result, the levee system was deemed "Inactive" in the P.L. 84-99 program. To address this issue, they entered into a System-Wide Improvement Framework, or SWIF. The SWIF program allows levees to regain an "active" status in P.L. 84-99 while the sponsor develops and implements a long-term repair plan. The repair plan, approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, outlines in detail the necessary repairs, ways the sponsor plans to fund the repairs, and defined timelines for completion.



US Army Corps  
of Engineers  
St. Louis District





Sliplined Pipe Inlet



Active Sluice Gate Rehabilitation Construction

## SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE FIELD

### Grand Tower & Degognia Levee: SWIF to Success Continued..

Around the time the repair plan was being drafted, Mr. Mark Holt was elected to the Degognia/Fountain Bluff Levee Board. He was quickly presented with the repair needs and the significant costs involved. Drawing from his 16 years of experience with the Jackson County Board, Holt worked to secure the necessary funding for the repairs. One of the first steps was to approach state representatives to reinstate the levee district's tax levy, which had expired in the 1990's. The commissioners also worked with an attorney to ensure the entire leveed area was being taxed, as previously, only part of the leveed area was contributing. Additionally, the commissioners sought interest-free loans from the state that come from revolving funds, meaning the levee district can receive the loans again after it has been repaid. Other sources of funding came in the form of grants from historic societies, departments of economic development, and other federal agencies. The levee system also received nearly \$150,000 over the years from the "Committee for a Safe Levee" – a group of volunteers from around the area that would organize and host annual fundraisers that included dinner, raffles, and donations.

With the SWIF helping to prioritize levee repairs and the new funding sources secured, significant improvements have been made. All gravity drains have been sliplined or abandoned, several sluice gates have been repaired, and numerous slides have been fixed. Two pump stations were fully rehabilitated, a new pump station is being constructed, and new relief wells are planned to be installed in an area that experiences significant seepage. Additionally, the sponsors plan to complete relief well pump testing when river levels allow.

This levee system's journey highlights the challenges of maintaining an aging levee, especially when faced with complex issues and changing requirements. Despite these challenges, the levee district has successfully completed vital repairs, effectively reducing flood risk. Maintaining a levee may seem like "taking bites out of an elephant" as Holt recalls his early experience, but with a clear plan and creative solutions, it's achievable.

### Did you know...

St. Louis District levee sponsors have camera inspected more than 425 gravity drains in the past 10 years.

425

100

In the past 10 years, nearly 100 gravity drains have been sliplined or replaced by St. Louis District levee sponsors.

# POLICY SPOTLIGHT

## Pump Station Rehabilitation Program

Do you have a federally built pump station with a major deficiency? If your levee was federally authorized by congress for construction (also known as a federal levee), your pump station may be eligible for a cost-shared rehabilitation in the future.

Section 133 of the 2020 Water Resources Development Act, provides the Corps of Engineers with the ability to cost share the rehabilitation of pump stations. While USACE has yet to acquire funding for this new program, interested levee districts are encouraged to coordinate with the St. Louis District to submit a request if the pump station meets the following requirements: 

### ***Important Note***

An increase in pump station capacity may be allowed under certain circumstances.

### **What Can be Rehabbed?**

- Pump Station Foundations and Housing
- Construction Materials
- Pipes
- Pumps
- Control Systems

The result includes a design that addresses the major deficiency, updates features to current design standards, and/or improves efficiency and the associated drainage. If your levee district is interested in submitting a request for pump station rehabilitation, please contact the Strategic Planning Coordinator to discuss your project:

**Shawn Sullivan**  
**[shawn.f.sullivan@usace.army.mil](mailto:shawn.f.sullivan@usace.army.mil)**  
**314-303-4778**

## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

### Community Outreach

As levee sponsors know, the time to find and address problems on the levee is before a flood hits. However, levees typically aren't at the forefront of people's minds until the water starts rising. This is why it is important to help communities in leveed areas better understand levees and their risks. If you are interested in collaborating with the USACE for outreach programming in your community, please contact the Acting Levee Safety Program Manager:

**Katie Ellis**  
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**314-897-1605**

# COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

## Kaskaskia Island Levee District Hosts Communication and Engagement Initiatives

By: SaVannah Worth

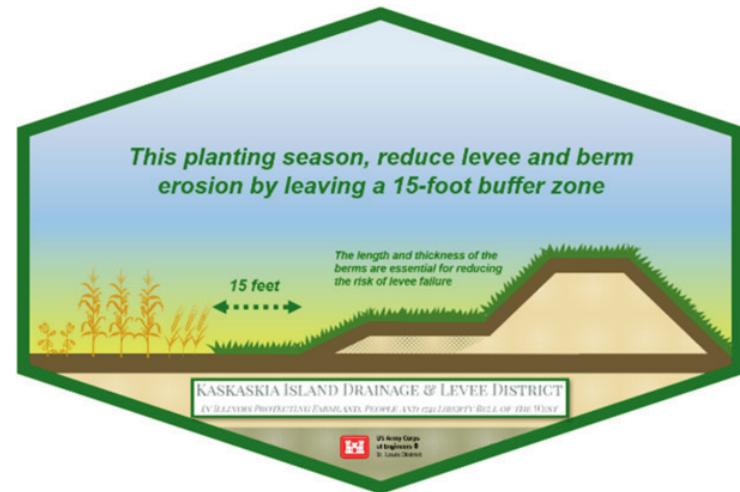
This past year, the Kaskaskia Island Drainage & Levee District found two creative ways to increase public awareness and educate neighboring communities on the deep history and national importance of their almost 10,000-acre leveed area.

### Berm Stickers

Recently, the Kaskaskia Island Drainage and Levee District has performed significant improvements to the levee. One of these improvements occurred when the levee district purchased land to construct the extension of seepage-mitigation berms. However, during the 2023 levee inspection, it was found that nearly all the berms were being farmed on. Over the years, farming on seepage berms can damage them, increasing the risk of levee failure. So, the levee district and USACE worked to develop a sticker that was distributed to farmers in the leveed area that communicates the importance of leaving a 15-foot buffer zone between the berm and crops.

### Brief History of Kaskaskia Island

The village of Kaskaskia, located in the center of the leveed area along the Mississippi River in Illinois, is home to the historic Immaculate Conception Church founded in 1675. The church grounds house the Liberty Bell of the West, which was cast in France in 1741 and given as a gift to the original French settlers of Kaskaskia from King Louis XV. When Illinois first became a state in 1818, Kaskaskia was chosen as its first capital. Throughout the 1800's the Mississippi River changed course and isolated Kaskaskia village from the rest of Illinois. The levee district organized the construction of their levee in the 1910's and the Kaskaskia Island leveed area is completely encircled by the levee and becomes an island when the Mississippi River floods.



### Love Your Levee Campaign

The Kaskaskia Island levee protects more than just rich farmland, it also protects the area's extensive history. Knowing this, the levee district partnered with the St. Louis District to develop a series of social media videos and posts through the Love Your Levee campaign. This campaign aims to highlight the vital role the levee plays for the area, and features interviews with key community members such as third generation levee commissioner and Kaskaskia native, Derek Klein, as well as Kaskaskia native and historian Emily Lyons. The social media campaign will be released later in 2025. Keep an eye out on the St. Louis District Facebook and Instagram, as well as the local newspapers to learn more about this levee area that has roots back to the 1600's.

## CONNECT WITH US!



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