

MARCH, 2016 FLOOD EVENT
Ouachita Parish, Louisiana

Background

The March, 2016 Flood Event (FEMA DR-4263) caused wide spread flooding throughout Ouachita Parish. The flooding damaged 5,357 privately owned homes and 5,230 rental units for a total of 10,587 residential structures. Additionally, approximately 640 commercial structures were flooded during the event. While some areas of the Parish experienced flash flooding and were only flooded a matter of days, other areas remained flooded for weeks. Maps are included with this document that indicate the limits of inundation due to the event. Officials from the City of Monroe, City of West Monroe, Homeland Security, National Guard, Police/Fire Departments and Ouachita Parish Police Jury worked closely throughout the event to minimize damage to property and effectively use resources. Open communications and a team effort between the various governmental entities were key in removing the flood waters and bringing comfort to the residents. During a hurricane disaster, there are typically several days and sometimes weeks to prepare and plan. Unfortunately, the March, 2016 Flood Event came with minimal time on the front end for preparation.

The east side of the Parish and west side of the Parish have separate drainage basins, but both sides drain to the Ouachita River. Most of the more densely populated areas of the west side of the Parish gravity flow directly to the Ouachita River until the River level rises enough for flood gates to be closed. Once flood gates are closed, floodwaters must be pumped to the river. Pumping is both costly and not as effective as gravity flow. Black Bayou Canal runs through the heart of the City of West Monroe as a concrete lined channel. Prior to reaching the outfall/pump station, Black Bayou Canal runs through a portion of the Parish as a natural channel with a relatively flat slope. The portion of this critical conveyance within the Parish must be improved and widened in order to get the flow to the outfall at a rate that minimizes the potential for flooding upstream.

The most eastern portion of the northeast quadrant of the Parish, the southeast portion of the City of Monroe and the southeast quadrant of the Parish gravity flow to the east through multiple tributaries to Bayou LaFourche which flows south and eventually into the Ouachita River. These areas rely totally on gravity flow through canals that need improvement and widening. Young's Bayou, the primary drainage canal for the City of Monroe, needs improvement, widening and alignment corrections.

The western portion of the northeast quadrant of the Parish gravity flows to the west to the Ouachita River. Similar to the west side of the Parish, gravity structures are utilized until the level in the Ouachita River requires flood gates to be closed. At that point, the floodwaters must be pumped by two (2) separate pump stations. The discharge pipe at the largest pump station (River Styx) must be replaced immediately due to a design flaw when constructed in the early 1990's. Various improvements are needed along Bayou DeSiard to direct the flow during flood events. Additionally, channel improvements need to be made to the tributaries leading to these pump stations.

Flood Event

Some experts have classified the March, 2016 Flood Event as a 1000-year event which is well outside normal design parameters for drainage structures. Approximately 16.58” of rainfall fell over Ouachita Parish in a 48-hour period. The Parish received 26.96” over the first 6-day period. Luckily, the area had not experienced heavy rainfall prior to the March, 2016 Flood Event and most of the basins were relatively low compared to the 1991 Flood Event. Even with the amount of rainfall we experienced in a compressed timeframe, there are flood control projects that have been identified that would have greatly reduced the footprint of flooding, and in some instances prevented the flooding completely. A list of potential projects for flood control improvements is included along with the estimated costs.

Current Conditions

Even though we are 9 months removed from the beginning of the March, 2016 Flood Event, effects still exist Parish wide. There are a number of residents who are unable to return to their homes and rental property costs are at a premium. Drainage Structures, Pump Stations, Levees, Bridges and Roadways are still in need of repair. While progress is being made and has been made, the Parish is in a vulnerable state if spring flooding occurs. Funding for repairs and flood control projects is desperately needed at a State and Federal level. Ouachita Parish is a Regional Hub, home to a majority of this area’s population and commercial base. If another flood event occurs prior to repairs being made and projects being built, the results would be catastrophic for our entire region.

Planning and Future Response

Both Cities and the Parish have met several times and discussed the flood event, improvements that can be made, steps to take moving forward and ways to prevent a disaster of this magnitude from happening in the future. Documentation will be prepared to establish a timeline of the flood event, record high water marks and provide information for future leaders to use in future flood events. Ordinances will be developed to establish base flood elevations, establish detention requirements, prevent development in sensitive flood hazard areas and coordinate the efforts of the various entities.

Projects will be developed independent of governmental boundaries and the drainage basins will be studied and improved as an overall system. Each project will be analyzed for potential benefits as well as any effects upstream and downstream.

Conclusions and Requests

As stated above, our Parish is the Regional Hub for all of Northeast Louisiana. We have a Fortune 150 Company located within the Parish. It is extremely important to our mission of continuing to move this Region and State forward that we receive adequate funding to improve existing flood control facilities as well as add additional structures. Our specific requests are:

1. Allow CDBG funds to be used to match Federal funding.
2. Dedicate adequate funding to flood control infrastructure and improving drainage canals. The infrastructure must be improved before homes are rebuilt in the same areas.