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High water threat brings threat of too little money

By Danny Barrett Jr.

Published:
Friday, May 8, 2009 1:13 PM CDT

Gaming tax revenue traditionally marked for road projects will have to rise along with river stages to finance more permanent repairs on LeTourneau Road if last year's flood marks are repeated.

Mississippi River

Today at Vicksburg: 39.0 feet

Crest forecast: 43.5 feet on May 19

Flood stage: 43 feet

Revenue from Vicksburg's five casinos paid in March to Warren County was slightly higher than the same period a year ago, with a \$304,969 payment expected from the state "any day now," County Administrator John Smith said. The county, which receives 25 percent of a revenue tax casinos pay to the state, received \$302,000 in March 2008. Since then, Riverwalk Casino was opened and became the area's fifth gaming venue.



But, as the Mississippi River's crest is forecast just above its 43-foot flood stage by May 19, sections of the LeTourneau County road still graveled from last year's flood damage could — at best — remain that way for the duration of budget constraints and an unbudgeted round of anti-erosion projects elsewhere in the county.

An emergency declaration could come by Tuesday if high water threatens the road, the board decided Thursday.

"You don't want it to get an inch above 45 (feet) because it will be a problem," said Richard George, District 1 board president.

LeTourneau Technologies' oil rig fabrication yard was accessible only by boat once river stages hit 48 feet during a rise that didn't crest until water reached 50.9 feet at the Vicksburg gauge. Part of the westbound lane about the yard and U.S. 61 South washed out, prompting a \$1 million repair of its supporting soils. A second federal

came in under engineering estimates, the board committed \$245,670 to a third list of NRCS projects.

On the debit side, increased payments to county employees' group health insurance plan have hit \$667,922 t outpacing budget estimates by at least 20 percent. Through March, the county's take of casino tax revenue is year's by about \$2,300 — ordinarily a good sign, now minimized by the possibility of more road repairs near l

Forecasts on the county's "working capital," estimated at \$445,007 coming into the fiscal year, vary greatly a in a wait-and-see mode along with river watchers.

"I think with the money situation like it is, we may have to roll the dice on this one," District 4 Supervisor Bill

The county sought and was all but approved for a \$1.5 million Community Development Block Grant to financ work to repair the remaining flood-damaged portion of LeTourneau Road.

However, plant officials at LeTourneau did not sign off the program administered by the Mississippi Developm because the facility was not confident about meeting employment minimums tied to the money. The road is t to the plant, which cut its labor force by a third in 2008 due to the economic recession.

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