



PHIL BRYANT
GOVERNOR

May 31, 2019

2019 JUN -7 PM 12:31
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary of Commerce
U.S. Department of Commerce
14th and Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

On February 27, 2019 the United States Corps Engineers opened the Bonnet Carré Spillway to relieve the pressure from the Mississippi River waterway system. The Bonnet Carré Spillway was closed on April 11, 2019. Subsequently this structure was, for the first time in its operational history, reopened on May 10, 2019, and remains open for the foreseeable future. As I am sure you are aware, the Bonnet Carré Spillway acts to divert the waters of the Mississippi River into Lake Pontchartrain, which ultimately flow into the Mississippi Sound. The large releases of fresh-water from the actions of the Spillway inundates the salt-waters of the Mississippi Sound and greatly disrupts the unique eco-system, and subsequently, all sea-life of this region.

We are currently observing significant adverse impacts to all components of Mississippi's marine resources including, but not limited to: oysters, crabs, shrimp and finfish. These adverse impacts are most observed in the oyster resources as they are immobile organisms. The current oyster mortality rate is being estimated at 70% and we anticipate this increasing over time as the Bonnet Carré Spillway remains open. Crab landings are currently estimated at a 35% loss; and as with oysters we foresee this figure increasing as we move through this event. The 2019 shrimp season has historically opened the first week of June. We are anticipating a much later date for this opening and much lower shrimp landings; this is directly the result of the freshwater intrusion into the Western Mississippi Sound. We are currently assessing the impacts of this event on marine finfish. A massive influx of freshwater typically impacts larval growth and juvenile recruitment into the fishery which could have lasting impacts over many years.

The state of Mississippi is initiating its own assessments of impacts to marine resources as well as other ecosystem impacts due to the opening of Spillway. I have directed The University of Southern Mississippi, host to one of the Gulf's premier ocean science and engineering programs, to lead on this effort and in partnership with the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources. We will not only understand current impacts from this effort, but will be in a position to model and track future impacts as well.

I am writing to you to request that you initiate the process to implement a federal fisheries disaster declaration as outlined in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. We will continue to monitor the influence of the Mississippi River freshwater as it continues to adversely impact the Mississippi Sound and update you with our findings from the assessment.

The declaration of a federal fisheries disaster for Mississippi may assist in obtaining financial assistance for all negatively impacted ecosystems, fishermen and related businesses in a timely manner.

Thank you for your consideration and this request.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Phil Bryant". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "P" and "B".

Phil Bryant
Governor