DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

STATEMENT OF

BRIGADIER GENERAL MICHAEL J. WALSH
DIVISION COMMANDER
MISSISSIPPI VALLEY DIVISION

BEFORE THE

ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE
UNITED STATES SENATE

ON

THE MIDWEST FLOOD OF 2008

JULY 23, 2008

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today to report on the response of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mississippi Valley Division during the Midwest flood event in the Mississippi Valley during June 2008. My testimony addresses both the response to the extensive flooding in the Midwest area as well as how we will continue to support and provide assistance to the people of this region in the recovery efforts from this significant event.

The Corps' first concern is always to ensure the safety of U.S. citizens and we cannot stress enough that each and every citizen should maintain situational awareness of current and future flood events, stay in touch for the latest updates and warnings, particularly the changing weather and river conditions as monitored and forecast by the National Weather Service, have evacuation plans prepared and implemented, and to stay away from flooded areas and moving water, unless involved in the flood fight effort.

In March of this year, the focus of the Corps' flood response efforts was centered along the lower Mississippi River, from Arkansas and Tennessee to the Gulf of Mexico. In June, our focus shifted to the middle and upper reaches of the Mississippi River and its tributaries, where extensive flooding - in some locations record setting flooding - occurred. Many Mississippi River tributaries, including the Cedar, Des Moines, and Iowa Rivers reached record, or near record, stages. The climate conditions early this spring led to continuous weather systems moving through the middle section of the country. These systems resulted in rainfall amounts up to twice the normal level for that time of year. This record

rainfall led to rivers and streams not only being filled to capacity, but in numerous locations, caused over-bank flooding.

The magnitude of the Midwest flood event of 2008 adversely impacted, and continues to impact, areas along the Mississippi River and its tributaries from Wisconsin and Minnesota to Arkansas and Tennessee. The Cedar River set new record stages, reaching six feet above the 1999 record stage at Cedar Falls, Iowa, and reaching eleven feet above the previous record at Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The Iowa River at Iowa City, Iowa, crested at three feet above the 1993 record stage, flooding facilities on the University of Iowa campus as well as other areas of the city. Record stages were set at over 47 gage stations on more than 12 tributary rivers and creeks. The Mississippi River set new record stages at Keithsburg and Gladstone, Illinois and Burlington, Iowa, and approached record stages at many more. Within the Mississippi Valley Division, specifically in the Rock Island and St. Louis Districts, a total of 19 non-Federal levee projects and six Federal levee projects, all under the USACE PL 84-99 Program, were overtopped along the Mississippi River, and in the Iowa and Turkey River basins. However, of the 200 levee projects in the PL 84-99 Program in those two districts, 175 were not overtopped. Locks at Lock and Dams 12 to 25 on the Mississippi River and Kaskaskia Lock on the Kaskaskia River were taken out of operation as flood waters overtopped the facilities, closing navigation in a major reach of the Upper Mississippi River.

In response to this historic flood event in the Midwest, reservoirs were operated in accordance with established water control manuals. In addition, the

Corps responded through emergency support to state and local governments (pursuant to PL 84-99), as well as through mission assignments from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Emergency Operations Centers responded through a variety of flood fighting activities on a continuous basis from our District offices in St. Paul, Rock Island, St Louis, and Memphis. The Corps also provided assistance to state and local governments through our own authorities as well as through mission assignment from FEMA. These missions included emergency response, technical assistance for all phases of debris management, and inspection of water and wastewater treatment systems. We assisted in the assessment of temporary housing needs, conducted assessments for provision of temporary emergency power, and through deployment of the 249th Engineer Battalion provided support for the power needs of critical facilities, including the University of Iowa Hospital. Approximately 1.7 million liters of drinking water was provided to the State of Iowa as well as critical public facility assistance in engineering design for repair and restoration of public schools. At the peak, there were 239 personnel engaged in providing flood fight assistance. Approximately 13 million sandbags, 100 pumps, and 3 thousand rolls of polyethylene sheeting were provided in support of local and State efforts.

I visited these impacted areas on several occasions and had the opportunity to talk to people and see examples of the effort put forth to control the situation. In a visit to the Sny Island Levee Drainage District in Illinois, I watched as ten bulldozers pushed sand up on levees to bolster them in the fight

to meet the predicted event. This example shows how the citizens of this region responded heroically to a difficult challenge over these past months.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will coordinate an Interagency Levee Task Force, comprising other Federal, State and local agencies, whose purpose is to conduct a regionally coordinated assessment of flood risk management systems in the areas affected by the 2008 flood. This task force will offer an opportunity for all participating agencies to address a rapid and effective response to damaged flood systems that will minimize future risk to life and property, while ensuring an effective interagency approach to flood damage mitigation, including opportunities for non-structural alternatives, in a collaborative manner.

Activities are currently underway to assess damages to flood damage reduction projects that are actively enrolled in the Corps Rehabilitation and Inspection Program, leading to subsequent repair of those projects. As accurate rainfall and river forecasts are vital for the protection of human life, property, and business operations as the 2008 floods reemphasized, a Rainfall/River Forecasting Summit with Federal agencies, State and local government entities, commercial interests, and the public is planned for early October to determine what went right, what went wrong, and what can be improved in the forecasting process.

The recent Supplemental Appropriations Act (Public Law 110-252), provided almost $606 million for the Corps to address multiple recent natural disasters, including the flooding in the Midwest. The Corps will continue to work

with our partners in Federal, State and local agencies to repair flood risk management infrastructure, as well as explore other means of reducing the risks of future flooding.

Again, thank you for allowing me to testify here today. Madam Chair, this concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.