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**U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS**

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**DR SUSAN I. REES WAS PRESENTED THE U.S ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, LT. GEN.  
JOHN W. MORRIS 2010 CIVILIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD**

**MOBILE, Ala.** – Dr. Susan Ivester Rees, Mobile District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) was presented the Lt. Gen. John W. Morris 2010 Civilian of the Year Award for her leadership of the Mississippi Coastal Improvements Program (MsCIP). Dr. Rees graciously accepted the award at the 2010 Summer Leaders Conference in Seattle, Washington on August 2.

Hurricane Katrina made landfall on August 29, 2005 on the Mississippi and Louisiana border, and the storm created widespread devastation to homes, businesses, industry, livelihoods and regional economies. The destruction was on a scale unparalleled by any natural disaster in U.S. history.

In response to this disaster, Congress authorized the USACE, Mobile District and New Orleans District to initiate two important and comprehensive planning efforts; the MsCIP and Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration (LaCPR). The plans were to address the impacts by this storm and make the region more resilient and less susceptible to risk from future storm events.

MsCIP is a comprehensive plan that integrates structural, nonstructural and environmental restoration components with the single goal of developing a Mississippi coast that is resilient to future storms. Features of the plan include: a comprehensive barrier island restoration plan; restoration of over 30,000 acres of coastal forest, wetland, beach, dune, submerged aquatic vegetation, and oyster reef habitat; restoration of historical water flow to the Mississippi Sound estuarine system; and hurricane and storm risk reduction in the form of structural and nonstructural plans. The nonstructural risk reduction plan is significant in its application to the coastal area and will remove 2000+ parcels within the highest risk zones of the coast from development.

MsCIP has not followed traditional Corps planning processes. There was not a selected plan or preferred alternative as in most Corps projects, however there were levels of projects and studies recommended for authorization.

The direction from Congress included a first phase which was to look at immediate solutions which could be implemented quickly along the coast and long term solutions through the MsCIP. Dr. Rees' intensive public involvement and engagement with coastal residents and stakeholders was pivotal in the formulation of 15 projects with a construction value that exceeds \$100M. These projects included opening of canals to improve water flow, beach reconstruction, rebuilding the Bay St. Louis seawall,

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## **2-2-2-2 DR SUSAN I. REES PRESENTED AWARD**

and other nonstructural solutions. This achievement met all of the aggressive congressional mandates and served as the foundation for the equally ambitious MsCIP Comprehensive Study. As Program Manager, Dr. Rees led the Project Delivery Team which was composed of more than 90 members from multiple Corps of Engineers Division, Districts, and laboratories, as well as various Federal, state, and local agencies, and members of the general public. The team completed this complex study in 2.5 years -- thus, expediting the time that the storm ravaged people of Mississippi could begin “putting their lives back together.”

The study presented a great technical challenge with equally high expectations from Congress, the Governor, residents of coastal Mississippi counties, and even the Corps itself. These challenges included system analysis, risk-based planning and communications, nonstructural solutions, and aggressive and inclusive communications – and all were accomplished within the framework of product delivery speed and divergent agency and community acceptance.

Dr. Rees’ led the MsCIP team in applying a collaborative approach to developing integrated sustainable water resources solutions across the coastal landscape of Mississippi and adjacent areas of Louisiana. Her communication and inter-personal skills were essential in developing close relationships with the State of Mississippi and the Federal community, especially Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Marine Fisheries Service.

The greatest accomplishment of Dr. Rees and her team was the success in gaining the confidence trust and respect of the citizens and agencies of Mississippi for the Corps’ ability to plan and formulate engineering solutions to complex problems. This was especially visible and prevalent with the Department of Marine Resources (DMR), the Governor’s envoy for Mississippi Hurricane Recovery. The DMR co-located personnel within the Mobile District Office, thereby setting the conditions for persistent and extensive coordination between the agencies which led to full DMR/Corps consensus on every recommendation and aspect of the Comprehensive Plan.

Dr. Rees’ collaborative interaction with the New Orleans District was superb. The MsCIP and LaCPR teams leveraged resources and expertise to assure consistency within the two efforts to insure that proposed engineering solutions in one study area would not have negative impacts in the other area; a major concern with the residents of Coastal Mississippi.

Because of her accomplishments, the residents of Coastal Mississippi are one step closer to a long term solution to their coast being more resilient and less susceptible to future storms.

Dr. Rees is a Member, Scientific Advisory Board, Alabama Center for Estuarine Studies, University of South Alabama, Member, Executive Committee, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program Member, Advisory Council, Mississippi Alabama Sea Grant Consortium Interim Director, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (12/96 – 7/97) Past Member, Board of Directors, South Alabama Regional Science Fair.

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