

62 of 2222 DOCUMENTS

Times-Picayune (New Orleans)

September 13, 2009 Sunday

Winds, rain, tides close London Ave. Canal gates; Rising lake levels led corps to make call

BYLINE: By Mark Schleifstein, Staff writer

SECTION: METRO; Pg. 1

LENGTH: 452 words

The Army Corps of Engineers closed the floodgates on the London Avenue Canal late Saturday afternoon after higher-than-normal tides and southerly winds on Lake Pontchartrain combined with heavy rainfall to raise water levels in the lake to more than 2.5 feet above sea level.

Col. Alvin Lee, commander of the corps' New Orleans district, ordered the gates closed at 5:45 p.m. after the water reached the 2.5-foot level and continued to rise.

It takes about 50 minutes to close the gates. Once they are closed, water is pumped from the canal into the lake to maintain a safe level in the canal.

The corps limits water entering the canal to guard against excess stress to the floodwalls. Closing the gates is intended to minimize the risk the Sewerage & Water Board will have to slow its pumps at two stations that drain rainwater into the canal, thereby increasing the chance of street flooding in the city.

The corps' pumps are capable of moving 5,200 cubic feet of water per second from the canal into the lake. A three-person team operates the gates and pumps from a nearby control room.

The decision to close the London Avenue Canal floodgates came just four days after the corps changed its policy to require that the gates be closed more quickly than before and -- for the first time -- during nontropical threats. The corps previously had required the gates to be closed when the lake level reached 4 feet above sea level.

In determining when to close the gates Saturday, a corps employee kept tabs on the level of water in the lake and compared it with measurements at a gauge on the lakeside of the gates, which corps officials said was picking up higher levels because of the amount of water poured into the canal by the S&WB pumps. That gauge showed the water level in the canal above 2.5 feet several times Friday night and during the day Saturday.

The National Weather Service, in issuing a flash-flood watch for southeastern Louisiana on Saturday afternoon, said a broad area of low pressure in the western Gulf of Mexico was pumping tropical moisture northward into south Louisiana. The system was producing prolonged rainfall, with periods of very heavy rain that could produce flash flooding at times through today.

As of Saturday evening, the system had produced between 1 and 3 inches of rain, with some locations along the coast receiving as much as 6 inches. Another 2 to 4 inches of rain was possible through this evening.

Winds, rain, tides close London Ave. Canal gates; Rising lake levels led corps to make call Times-Picayune (New Orleans) September 13, 2009 Sunday

The weather service also issued a coastal flood watch because tides were expected to be as much as 2 feet above normal, in part because of winds created by the low-pressure system.

.....

Mark Schleifstein can be reached at mschleifstein@timespicayune.com or 504.826.3327.

LOAD-DATE: September 13, 2009

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

GRAPHIC: PHOTOS BY SCOTT THRELKELD / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

As water is pumped into Lake Pontchartrain, Randy Faherty of the Army Corps of Engineers puts a steel pin in place to lock in a lowered floodgate Saturday at the London Avenue Canal. [5158973] Water just clears the Leon C. Simon Boulevard bridge Saturday at the London Avenue Canal. [5158971]

MICHAEL DeMOCKER / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

The canal behind the London Avenue canal is swollen at high tide early in the afternoon on Saturday. The high water levels prompted the Army Corps of Engineers to close the floodgates, center. [5158991]

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

Copyright 2009 The Times-Picayune Publishing Company