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EDWARDSVILLE

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BULLETIN

To the Faculty, Staff and Students of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Vol. 30, No. 7
March 26, 1999

MEMO TO: SIUE Community
FROM: David Werner 
SUBJECT: Flooding of Sand Road

Most likely you have read recent stories in the Edwardsville Intelligencer, the Belleville News Democrat, and the St. Louis Post Dispatch about flooding problems along Sand Road which runs north-south along part of SIUE's western boundary. (Refer to the map for location of Sand Road and the area of flooding.) Most people are not aware that SIUE's property extends as far west as Sand Road because the land is currently leased to local farmers for agricultural purposes and, accordingly, does not "look like" University property.

Background

The western part of the SIUE campus is part of the Great American Bottoms, land that was once part of the Mississippi riverbed. This area has a very high water table and is prone to flooding under the best of circumstances. You may have noticed the water in the fields along I-270 following a heavy rain. Extensive development on the bluffs in southwestern Illinois has caused increasing storm water runoff problems throughout the Great American Bottoms.

Flooding along Sand Road dates back to before the University was created, but it has accelerated in recent years along with the rapid development in the Edwardsville-Glen Carbon area. In addition, the amount of rainfall and the intensity of storms in the Edwardsville area have increased in recent years, a result of the "heat island" effect of development in St. Louis.

Understandably, the homeowners along the western side of Sand Road are upset about the increased flooding. Unfortunately, they blame SIUE for the flooding, and are looking to us to solve their problem. More than four years ago, Vice Chancellor Kenn Neher first met with the residents of the Sand Road area to hear their concerns and to explain what the University had done and planned to do to control storm water runoff.

Most of the water affecting the Sand Road area does not originate on SIUE property. Rather, it originates from developed areas along Illinois Route 157. The water then flows through other developed areas and channels into the ravine along the Madison County bike trail on the southeastern border of campus. The flow continues from there into culverts under University Drive and Bluff Road, follows the property line between SIUE and the sod farm, and then crosses onto University land for a few hundred yards before reaching two 24" culverts at Sand Road. These 24" culverts are incapable of handling the flow of water and, therefore, flooding occurs. Storm water runoff is getting worse, and has now reached the point that during severe storms it is starting to flood Bluff Road as well.

(Should you be interested in observing the path of the flow, enjoy a walk on the bike path that runs from Illinois Route 157 to University Drive, particularly the part west of the road leading to the Supporting Services Building. You will be able to see for yourself the tributaries that are carrying the water toward Bluff and Sand Roads. It is very clear that most of the water causing the flooding does not originate on SIUE property.)

University Action

Nearly all of SIUE's storm water is controlled by detention structures. The water from all of the parking lots, except Lots B, C, and 4, and from all of the campus north of Rendleman Hall, the University Center, and the Art and Design Building flows into Stump Lake or Cougar Lake and is, therefore, fully controlled and **never** reaches Sand Road. Over the last several years, at a cost of about \$200,000, the University has constructed a series of detention ponds to control the water runoff from the areas that do not drain into these two lakes. An additional detention pond is under construction along Supporting Services Road that will control the water from University Park and some of the developments along Illinois Route 157. Because of these lakes and detention ponds, engineering studies indicate that there is **less** runoff from University land today than there was before the campus was built when the property was used largely for agricultural purposes. There will be still less when the new detention pond is complete.

What Do Others Want Us to Do?

Some of the proposals described in the press involve constructing wetlands on University property below the bluffs to hold storm water. Since none of the proposals have been formally presented to the University, details are not available. However, it is our understanding that these proposals would involve the use of between 170 and 600 acres of University land to create a very large detention basin or wetland.

We have significant concern about these proposals for several reasons. First, we believe that it would be irresponsible to set aside, permanently, such a huge amount of University property. The founders of SIUE were extraordinarily farsighted in acquiring a very large campus to provide for the long-term development of the University. While most of the land in question is now leased for agricultural use, it may well be needed for other purposes in the future. We, today, are in no position to determine the needs SIUE may have in 50 years or 100 years or more. But, we do have the responsibility to make sure that our decisions today do not unnecessarily limit the ability of those who follow us to respond to the future educational needs of the citizens of Illinois.

Second, based on the information available, we do not believe that constructing a wetland or detention basin would solve the problem. The soil structure in that area is not conducive to a wetland and the large amount of silt in the runoff would quickly fill a basin. Rather, our conclusion is that the problem is best addressed by retaining the water as close as possible to its source. Certainly, creating a basin along Sand Road would not solve the flooding along Bluff Road.

Finally, we understand that one of the proposals to build a wetland on SIUE property may originate with a developer seeking to abate the destruction of a wetland elsewhere. In our view, it would be inappropriate for publicly owned University land to be used to solve the problem of a private company.

What Does SIUE Plan to Do?

While SIUE is not causing the flooding of Sand Road, we want to be a good neighbor and to be part of the solution. The studies we have conducted suggest that the best approach to this problem is to retain the water on the bluffs and release it slowly. The water affecting Sand and Bluff Roads can be best retained along the Madison County Bike Trail on land owned by the University, Madison County Transit, and Sunset Hills Country Club. Accordingly, we are engaged in discussions with these property owners to develop plans to build retention ponds in that area. By holding the water in those ponds, we believe that we can eliminate the flooding of Bluff Road and significantly reduce the flooding of Sand Road. Given that Sand Road lies in a flood plain with a very high water table, it may not be possible to ever solve fully the flooding problems there.

I will keep you informed as we work with others, including local legislators, to move toward finding and implementing a solution.

Location of
flooding →

