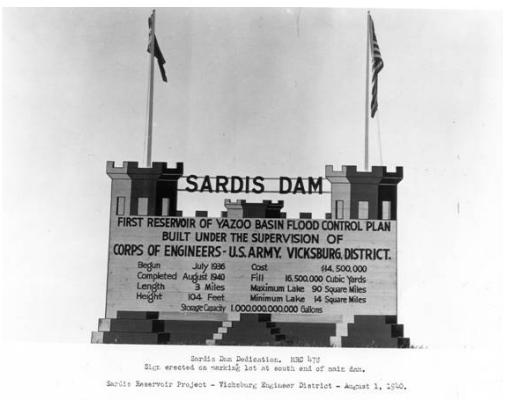
US Army Corps of Engineers Vicksburg District

The Mississippi River had flowed unabated for thousands of years overflowing its banks at will and spilling out into the fertile deltas along its way to the sea. However as European settlers moved into the vast Mississippi Valley they soon began to plan and construct dams, levees and diversions to control the seasonal flooding. Early examples of these efforts can be seen in work done in the 1840s near St. Louis by a young Corps of Engineers Major Robert E Lee. With increased population the floods caused more damage and loss of life.



Sardis Dam Dedication. KMC 4-43
Sign erected on marking lot 46 south end of main dam.
Sardis Reservoir Project - Vicksburg Engineer District - August 1, 1940.

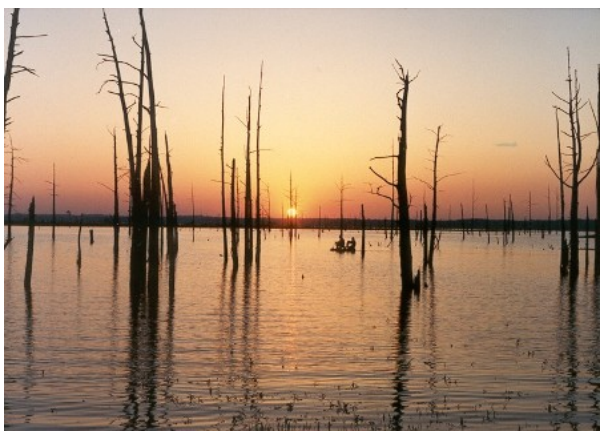

WAR DEPARTMENT VICKSBURG ENGINEER DISTRICT
U. S. Dredge Pontotoc. 24-inch electric cutter-head dredge being used on the Sardis Reservoir Project. Hull built by Government plant and hired labor. Launched November 10, 1937. Machinery shipped in from points of manufacture and installed on dredge.
Photograph taken April 8, 1938.

In response to the devastating floods of 1927 congress passed the 1928 Flood Control Act and later the 1936 Flood Control Act. These two Acts would be the corner stone of a mammoth undertaking to tame the mighty Mississippi and her primary tributaries. One chapter in this epic endeavor called for the protection of the rich delta farmlands of West Mississippi. To do this it would be necessary to control the waters of the Yazoo River. Engineers soon devised a plan to construct four strategically placed dams to control the drainage from the Northern hill country. A proposed Dam to control the water from the Little Tallahatchie River in Northwest Mississippi soon became a reality. Construction began in the mid 1930's and with a labor force close to a thousand it would have the added benefit of providing much needed economic stimulus for a region extremely hard hit by the depression.

Once there was congressional approval, work on Sardis Dam soon reached a feverish pace. Twelve-hour days, seven days a week were the rule not the exception while Sardis Dam lay strewn on the drawing boards. Out in the dusty fields however, it was a different story. Thousands of men toiled, doing backbreaking work using mules, brush hooks, crosscut saws and axes to clear fourteen miles along the Little Tallahatchie River, characterized by cutover hardwood, dense undergrowth and meandering sloughs. Becoming operational in October 1940, the dam embodied some of the most advanced design and construction methods of its day. At 15,300 feet in length, and with an average height of 97 feet, Sardis Dam was for many years the largest earth-filled type in the world!

The most unique aspect of the dam's construction was the use of "hydraulic fill" techniques. This required that soil be dredged from the river below the dam site and pumped up to provide the earth fill that forms the major portion of the dam. To facilitate this, the Corps built and operated the "Pontotoc", a special dredge powered by two 3000 hp electric motors. The 425-acre "Lower Lake" on the downstream side of Sardis Dam created by the dredging operation today boasts the project's most dense concentration of recreational facilities.

Many visitors to Sardis Lake do not know of the project's role in flood control. To them, Sardis Lake is a place to play. The lake is popular with anglers and has a reputation for its abundant bass and crappie. Other recreation activities include hunting, camping, boating, skiing, swimming and picnicking. Come walk through our visitor center and take a step back in time. It will not take you long to understand the importance of the dam then and now.



Flood Risk Management

Many visitors to Sardis Lake do not know of the project's role in flood control. Sardis Lake has a maximum storage capacity of 1,512,000 acre feet of water. During the fall and winter months the lake is gradually drawn down to a "conservation pool" of 9800 acres. This allows for storage of spring rains from the 1545 square mile drainage area above the dam.

Sardis Lake has performed its flood control mission admirably well. Since it became operational, the dam's overflow spillway has only been placed into operation during the flood years of 1973, 1983 and 1991. The lake's normal "recreation pool" is 32,500 acres.

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areas on the Sardis Lake Project. The numbers are then compiled and the volunteers are each given an event t-shirt and provided lunch. The survey provides valuable data on the number of eagles that frequent Sardis Lake each year, as well as, an opportunity for volunteers to view our nation's national emblem in its natural habitat.

Fish Habitat Day: Each December, volunteers alongside Sardis Lake staff gather to place discarded Christmas Trees into the lake bed while the lake is at conservation pool level. With the help of local businesses, cities, and citizens, hundreds of discarded Christmas Trees are placed in various areas around the lake. As spring rains bring a rising lake level, the trees are submersed creating much needed habitat for many fish species. The habitat provides cover for spawning fish species and their young and offers protection for young or small fish from predator species. As Sardis Lake continues to age and due to the fluctuating water levels each year, underwater habitat is gradually lost. Through events like Fish Habitat Day, habitat is restored at a more rapid pace than it is lost, thus providing a more enjoyable fishing experience and quality fish habitat at Sardis Lake.

Adopt-A-Stream: The Adopt-A-Stream program is a partnership between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Sardis Lake and local schools. The program is conducted at Toby Tubby and Hurricane Creeks and offers students an opportunity to collect water quality data for the tributaries to Sardis Lake.

Interpretive Services and Outreach/Education Programs: Interpretive Programs have long been an integral part of Visitor Assistance at Sardis Lake. Programs are conducted in a variety of setting; such as boat ramps, swimming beaches, pavilions and local schools, churches and businesses. The topics of these programs include water and boating safety, environmental stewardship, natural resource management, and native wildlife. Each year thousands of people are educated on the above-mentioned topics through the use of Outreach Programs by Sardis Lake employees.

Clean Up Day: Clean Up Day is an annual event held at Sardis Lake. Each year, participants from local schools and communities volunteer their time to remove litter and debris from areas on the Sardis Lake Project. The event has proven to be one of the most beneficial events promoted at Sardis Lake. Several thousand pounds of litter is removed from the lakeshore each year improving the aesthetic value of natural areas around the project.

Natural Resource Management

The natural environment surrounding Sardis Lake is a diverse ecosystem. As the rolling hills give way to vast hardwood river bottoms, the landscape captures a scene of beauty and serenity. Through natural resources management and environmental stewardship, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Sardis Lake seeks to protect and preserve these resources to provide a healthy and sustainable natural world for our generation and future generations. The quality and health of our natural and cultural resource aspects, such as wildlife, fisheries, forests, grasslands, wetlands, air and water resources, are of the utmost importance to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Sardis Lake. As stewards of the lands and waters at Sardis Lake, our ultimate goal is to effectively manage and protect natural and cultural resources through proven management tools and techniques in order to preserve them for the generations of tomorrow.

Forest resources at Sardis Lake comprise approximately 44,000 acres. They are managed to promote future resources of timber through sustained yield programs and reforestation and to provide recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, erosion control, and aesthetics. These goals are accomplished through the application of accepted conservation practices, such as prescribed burning, fire lanes, cruising, planting seedlings, thinning, and improvement cutting.

The Use of Natural Resources Management Techniques

Natural resource management at Sardis Lake is promoted through a variety of management techniques and special events. Through the participation of volunteers and other Federal, state and local agencies, we practice and promote natural resource management techniques and environmental stewardship to ensure a safe balance between quality outdoor recreation experiences and the health of natural and cultural resources. The following is a listing of the natural resource management techniques used at Sardis Lake.

Management Techniques

Prescribed Burning: Prescribed burns are used to remove undesirable vegetation from the forest floor of hardwood and pine timber stands. The controlled burns are used to reduce the amount of combustible materials available in the event of an uncontrolled wildfire. These controlled burns also remove litter from the forest floor allowing for new vegetation growth in the area. The new growth provides natural forage and browse for many game

nutrition for White-tail deer, Bobwhite quail, Eastern wild turkey, migrating waterfowl species, rabbit, dove, raccoon and squirrel. Some of the planted crop species are sorghum, soybeans, chufa, millet, clover, wheat and corn.