



Meredith Spencer • The Vicksburg Post

Dave Derrick, kneeling, an engineer in the Coastal and Hydraulics Lab of Waterways Experiment Station, works at Clear Creek Tuesday afternoon with one of five classes studying how land changes due to water flow.

Engineers suit up to study water

By Wilson Boyd
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Clear Creek is not usually known as a classroom, and most students don't wear hip waders to class. Nevertheless, over two dozen wader-clad students stood in and around the creek Tuesday afternoon, taking notes as Dave Derrick made diagrams in sand.

Twenty-nine engineers from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers districts across the country were in Vicksburg to learn better ways to tame erosion around rivers.

Derrick, a research hydraulic engineer in the Coastal and Hydraulics Lab at Waterways Experiment Station, divided the class into five groups. They marched up and down Clear Creek around the Tiffintown

bridge to study how engineers stabilized the bank around the base of the bridge.

The bridge collapsed in the early 1990s and was replaced in 1994, costing \$672,000 in federal and state funds. While the bridge was closed, residents who lived in several subdivisions beyond the bridge had to take a 10-mile detour through Flowers.

A \$183,700 agreement signed in 1998 by Warren County and Corps of Engineers officials now provides funding to protect the bridge, creek and shoreline.

The five groups are using the erosion problems as a model to conduct studies with different, hypothetical goals. The overriding idea is to study changes of the land due to water flow.

"We walk through the same

stretch, but everybody's got different goals," Derrick said.

Some are examining the creek area with agricultural needs in mind. Others aim to minimize cost.

The engineers are from districts across the country, including Alaska, Chicago and Virginia. The week-long course is taught twice a year by Derrick, who taught almost 1,000 people in courses in 2003. He is a 26-year employee of WES.

This week's course, however, does have one important first for Derrick. It's a "paperless course" — the first of 366 courses offered by the Corps of Engineers to be done entirely by computer.

"The cool thing is that I don't have to do a big notebook that I have to copy myself," he said. "I got tired of making copies."