

Drop in casino revenue means tax hike likely by levee board

Written by Administrator
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CLARKSDALE, Miss. (AP) - The Yazoo Mississippi Delta Levee Board has scheduled a public meeting July 9 on a proposed tax increase.

Since 1996, levee board has not raised taxes. The Clarkdale Press Register reports (<http://bit.ly/1eLOfcF>) that's likely to change.

The levee board - which is tasked with maintaining the levee system in 12 counties - got its revenue from casino rentals. The land on the "wetside" of the levee is public land, and the levee board charged rent to the casinos docked along the banks of the Mississippi River.

Since 2008, after the economic collapse and the creation of newer casinos in other parts of the country, the Mississippi Delta casinos have made less and less money. The revenue drop forced Harrah's to close its Tunica casino in June 2014.

Levee board attorney John Henson said the board is facing a \$3.6 million deficit in the next fiscal year.

"For the last four years, the board has been making some pretty drastic reductions," Henson said. "They've had a reduction in force twice, and they've reduced their personnel by a large amount and through retirements and so forth, they've gone from over 60 employees to just over 20."

The levee board is considering a 2-mill property tax increase, which Henson would mean about \$20 a year more on a \$100,000 home.

The most recent revenue reports released from the state show that while revenue is up for casinos along the Gulf, it's still down in the Mississippi Delta. State figures show revenues have fallen for 32 of the last 35 months along the Mississippi River.

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The Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Levee Board is responsible for the first 98 miles of mainline Mississippi River levee starting just south of Memphis to the Bolivar County line. The district, headquartered in Clarksdale, is comprised of all or portions of DeSoto, Tunica, Coahoma, Sunflower, Quitman, Tallahatchie, Leflore, Humphreys, Holmes and Yazoo counties.

Information from: The Clarksdale Press Register.

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