

# Flights Above the Mississippi Alluvial Plain and Adjacent Areas to Continue Aquifer Mapping



Airplane that will conduct low-level flights. Beneath the plane is a "bird" receiver (shown here in its stowed position under the aircraft) which will be towed behind the aircraft during the survey. Operated by Xcalibur Multiphysics under contract to the USGS. Photo courtesy Xcalibur Multiphysics.

A low-flying airplane will soon be visible to residents in the multi-state area comprising the Mississippi Alluvial Plain (MAP), as well as adjacent areas in the Mississippi Embayment and Chicot Aquifer, marking the beginning of the next stage of a high-resolution airborne survey project to map aquifers.

Coordinated by USGS scientists to map the properties of aquifers throughout parts of the MAP, the low-level flights are intended to provide critical data needed by state and local decisionmakers to evaluate and manage groundwater resources in the region. The MAP is one of the most productive agricultural regions in the nation and depends on groundwater for irrigation. It constitutes the third-largest area of irrigated cropland in the U.S., consisting of approximately 29,000 square miles, or 19 million acres, and includes parts of Missouri, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Kentucky and Illinois.

Beginning in late August and lasting for 2-3 months, an airplane contracted by the USGS and operated by Xcalibur Multiphysics of Ontario, Canada, will make low-level flights over more than 20 million acres and seven states within the MAP and adjacent areas. Experienced pilots specially trained and approved for low-level flying will operate the aircraft. All flights are coordinated with the FAA to ensure accordance with U.S. law. The flights will initially be based out of Greenwood-Leflore Airport in Mississippi, then

will work from other airports in the region as the survey progresses. Follow the planned flight lines here.

Previous phases of airborne geophysical data acquisition over the MAP region using the same airplane and instrumentation occurred in late 2019 to early 2020, as well as multiple helicopter surveys over the region from 2018 to 2021. Examples of the products generated from the previous surveys include the recently published interactive maps of the high-resolution survey near Shellmound, Mississippi, and of the regional, MAP-wide surveys.

Instruments on the airplane will collect information about the geology in shallow aquifers of the region. When the data analysis is complete, re-

sulting state-of-the-art maps will help USGS researchers understand the aquifer system that supports groundwater resources at depths up to about 1,000 feet underground.

This survey will be flown mainly east-west at an altitude of 400 feet along lines spaced approximately four miles apart. The airplane will have an attached electromagnetic instrument housed in a tometer and a gamma-ray

small receiver that is towed 300 feet behind and about 150 feet beneath the aircraft. All survey flights will occur during daylight hours.

Residents and visitors should not be alarmed to witness a low-flying aircraft with a small sensor towed behind it. The airplane will also carry scientific instruments including a magnetometer housed in a tometer and a gamma-ray

spectrometer. None of the instruments pose a health risk to people or animals, and flights will not occur directly above populated areas.

The survey is being conducted by the USGS Water Availability and Use Program as part of the MAP Regional Water Availability Study. More information about the MAP project can be found online.

## Extended Closed School Discharge will Provide 115K borrowers from ITT Technical Institute more than \$1.1B in loan forgiveness

Recently, the U.S. Department of Education announced it will make \$1.1 billion in closed school discharges available to an additional 115,000 borrowers who attended the now-defunct ITT Technical Institute (ITT). This decision is based on a new review of the problems leading up to ITT's closure. These borrowers did not complete their degree or credential and left ITT on or after March 31, 2008. The Department estimates that 43 percent of these borrowers are currently in default.

Today's action brings the total amount of loan dis-

charges approved by the De-

partment since January 2021 to \$9.5 billion, affecting over 563,000 borrowers.

This action extends relief to borrowers whose attendance at ITT overlapped with a period during which the institution engaged in widespread misrepresentations about the true state of its financial health and misled students into taking out unaffordable private loans that were allegedly portrayed as grant aid.

ITT's malfeasance drove its financial resources away from educating students in order to keep the school in business for years longer than it likely would otherwise have, resulting in debts that are being discharged starting today.

Approximately 7,000 of the borrowers covered by today's closed school discharge announcement also have approved borrower defense to repayment claims.

"For years, ITT hid its true financial state from borrowers while luring many of them into taking out private loans with misleading and unaffordable terms that may have caused borrowers to leave school," said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. "Today's action continues the Department's efforts to improve and use its targeted loan relief authorities to deliver meaningful help to student borrowers.

At the same time, the continued cost of addressing the wrongdoing of ITT and other predatory institutions yet again highlights the need for stronger and faster accountability throughout the federal financial aid system."

Under the Higher Education Act and applicable regulations, the Secretary of Education discharges the loans of borrowers and refunds any amounts paid if the borrowers did not complete their program of study because of their school's closure. This applies to borrowers with loans from the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan Program, the Federal Family Education Loan Program, and the Federal Perkins Loan Program.

To be eligible for a closed school discharge, the borrower must not have completed their program or transferred their credits or hours to another school. Discharges are also available to any borrower who withdrew from the institution within a few months of its closing.

The Secretary of Education may, however, extend this period based on exceptional circumstances.

After a thorough review of the circumstances leading to ITT's closure and the preceding years of misrepresentations and misconduct, Secretary Cardona is exercising his authority to extend the closed school discharge window to March 31, 2008 for former ITT students. This date was chosen based upon a review of external evidence from the bankruptcy court proceedings for ITT, filings with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), and from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB).

March 31, 2008 is when the company's executives publicly disclosed the start of a financial scheme that kicked off a series of misrepresentations to hide the true nature of the school's finances following a public loss of outside financing, which led to shifting additional costs to students and hindered its ability to invest in delivering quality education to students.

Next steps for borrowers

Under Department regulations, borrowers who are eligible for a closed school discharge and attended an institution that shut down between November 1, 2013 and July 1, 2020 will receive an automatic discharge as long as they did not enroll in another institution within three years of their school's

closure. Eligible borrowers who attended ITT within 120 days of its closure in 2016 received automatic discharges in 2019. The majority of the ITT borrowers covered by today's action did not enroll elsewhere during the three years after ITT's closure and will not need to take any further action to receive a discharge.

Borrowers who enrolled elsewhere but did not complete their program of study may still be eligible for a discharge, but will need to submit an application. Borrowers can access the closed school discharge application by contacting their servicer or visiting StudentAid.gov/closedschoolform and returning a completed application to their servicer.

The Department will begin processing discharges in September 2021 and borrowers will start receiving automatic discharges in the following weeks.

Continued commitments to helping student loan borrowers

This action is another in a series of steps the Department has to support students and borrowers, make higher education more affordable, and improve student loan servicing, including:

- \* Extending the pause on student loan repayment, interest, and collections through January 31, 2022 and expanding it to include additional borrowers in default. This change helps 41 million borrowers.

- \* Approving \$1.5 billion in borrower defense claims, including extending full relief to approved claims and approving new types of claims.

- \* Providing \$7.1 billion in relief for borrowers eligible for total and permanent disability discharges. This includes \$5.8 billion in automatic student loan discharges to 323,000 borrowers and reinstating \$1.3 billion in loan discharges for another 41,000 borrowers.

- \* Helping 30,000 small business owners with student loans seeking help from the Paycheck Protection Program.

- \* Retroactively waiving student loan interest for 47,000 current and former active-duty military service members.

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