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NEWS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BUILDING STRONG®

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Critical rock removal work progressing efficiently resulting in open channel

ST. LOUIS. MO., January 13, 2013 – The first phase of the most critical rock removal work on the Mississippi River near Thebes, Ill., has been completed ahead of schedule, providing mariners with additional depth in the navigation channel.

"The Corps is especially pleased with the efficient and effective performance of the rock removal effort, which deepened the navigation channel by two feet in just three weeks," said St. Louis District Commander, Col. Christopher Hall.

The work removed approximately 365 cubic yards of limestone from the river to reduce the risk for vessels in the channel during extreme low water. The rocks were part of a large formation that impedes the navigation channel during extreme low water. The initial phase of the work addressed areas that had the most immediate impact on navigation and additional rock removal work is ongoing.

Work began Dec. 16, with the initial rock removal performed by heavy excavators. Blasting operations began Dec. 21, taking place during daylight hours with the U.S. Coast Guard coordinating notices to mariners and directing barge traffic from their mobile command post in nearby Cape Girardeau, Mo. Since December 10, the Unified Command of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Coast Guard and river industry have used their collaborative Vessel Management Group to keep 630 vessels and 6,123 barges moving on the river.

Rock removal on the six-mile stretch of river was accomplished through two contracts awarded by the Corps' St. Louis District: Newt Marine, Inc., of Dubuque, Iowa, removed the rock formation upstream of Thebes; and Kokosing Construction, from Fredericktown, Ohio, removed the rock formation downstream of Thebes.

"The Corps has used every resource available to us to successfully sustain navigation," said Maj. Gen. John Peabody, Mississippi Valley Division Commander. "The success of the rock removal work, combined with recent and forecast rain, increases our confidence we will sustain an adequate channel through this spring," he added.

Removing the rock formations was one of many operations the Corps initiated along the narrowing river to maintain a 9-foot-deep channel for river navigation. Dredging has been ongoing since early May 2012 to preserve the channel, as well as continued surveys and channel patrols by the Corp and Coast Guard to keep commerce safely moving on the middle Mississippi River.

The Corps worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Missouri Department of Conservation to avoid and minimize impacts to the environment during the rock removal process, and is also in constant communication and coordination with the Coast Guard and the river industry as the drought has reduced water levels throughout the Mississippi River Basin to historic lows.

For more information, visit www.mvs.usace.army.mil/lowwater.

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