



Mississippi River Commission

Executive Summary 373rd Session

Listening, Inspecting, Partnering & Engineering since 1879



Mississippi River Commission

The Mississippi River Commission has a proud heritage that dates back to June 28, 1879. Congress established the seven-member presidential Commission with the mission to transform the Mississippi River into a reliable commercial artery, while protecting adjacent towns and fertile agricultural lands from destructive floods. The 1879 legislation that created the Commission granted the body extensive planning authority and jurisdiction on the Mississippi River stretching from its headwaters at Lake Itasca to the Head of Passes, near its mouth at the Gulf of Mexico. The Mississippi River Commission quickly assumed the role of an active Federal agent capable of transcending the regional issues that had previously hampered the development of a more effective river improvement system. The Commission began improving the navigation channel to promote commerce, setting standards for levee construction, and holding public hearings to give local interests a greater voice in shaping federal policy.

In its current capacity, the Mississippi River Commissions prosecutes the Mississippi River & Tributaries (MR&T) project authorized by the 1928 Flood Control Act. The MR&T project employs a variety of engineering techniques, including an

extensive levee system to prevent disastrous overflows on developed alluvial lands; floodways to safely divert excess flows past critical reaches so that the levee system will not be unduly stressed; channel improvements and stabilization features to protect the integrity of flood control measures and to ensure proper alignment and depth of the navigation channel; and tributary basin improvements, to include levees, headwater reservoirs, and pumping stations, that maximize the benefits realized on the main stem by expanding flood protection coverage and improving drainage into adjacent areas within the alluvial valley. Since its initiation, the MR&T program has brought an unprecedented degree of flood protection to the approximate 4 million people living in the 35,000 square-mile project area within the lower Mississippi Valley. The nation has contributed nearly \$13 billion toward the planning, construction, operation, and maintenance of the project. To date the nation has received a 24 to 1 return on that investment, including \$306 billion in flood damages prevented.

The Mississippi River Commission continued its 126-year process of listening to the concerns of partners and stakeholders, inspecting the challenges posed by the river, and partnering to find sustainable engineering solutions to those challenges through the 2005 Low-Water Inspection (373rd session of the Mississippi River Commission). The official record of the Proceedings of the Mississippi River Commission, complete with recorded hearings of public meetings, copies of signed formal statements provided by the public, executive summaries of the Proceedings, and other documents of significance, are kept on file in the Office of the President in Vicksburg, Miss.

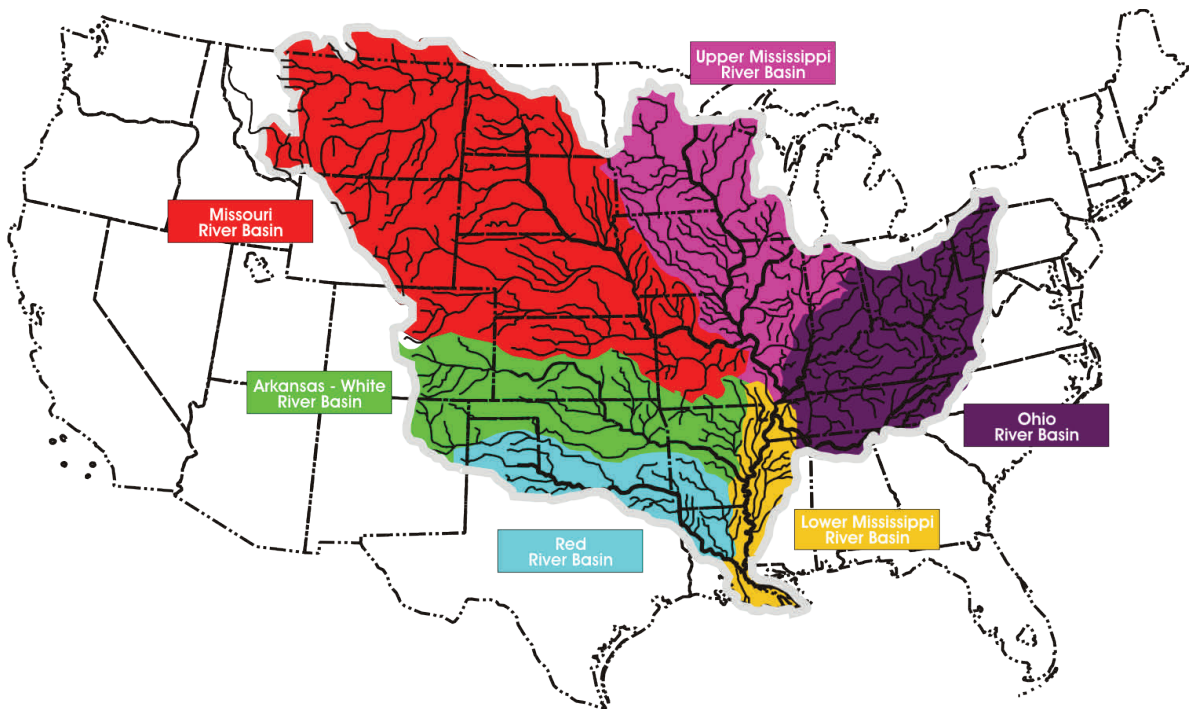




Mississippi Drainage Basin Approach

The Mississippi River basin drains 41 percent of the continental United States. Approximately 1.25 million square miles, more than 250 tributaries, 31 states, and parts of two Canadian provinces comprise the drainage basin. Since 1879, the Mississippi River Commission has developed and matured plans for the general improvement of the Mississippi River from its headwaters to the Head of Passes near the Gulf of Mexico. With the advent of the MR&T Project in 1928, the Commission's attention necessarily focused solely on the Alluvial Valley, the 35,000 square-mile historic floodplain of the lower Mississippi that rests at the foot of the drainage basin and extends southward from Thebes, Mo., to the Gulf.

The management practices in the major individual sub-basins of the larger Mississippi basin directly impact the operations and decisions of the Commission and its implementation of the MR&T project. As the MR&T project matured and prospered, the Commission resumed inspections of the upper Mississippi River in 1997. The benefits of extending the Commission's time-tested process of listing, inspecting, and partnering to the upper Mississippi River led the Commission to consider inspections and improved coordination in the Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, Arkansas, and Red river basins by meeting face-to-face with stakeholders, federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and local U.S. Army Corps of Engineers offices to better understand the concerns, issues, and practices across the watershed as a whole and to build sustainable partnerships to overcome existing and potential challenges.





Low-Water Inspection Trip Report

Mississippi Drainage Basin Approach



As a result of this decision, the Commission reviewed and inspected the Ohio River Basin as part of its 373rd session. The Commission was encouraged by what it witnessed and learned during its tour of the Ohio Basin. The interaction and synchronization among the partners, stakeholders, and federal agencies impressed the Commission, particularly in light of the vast infrastructure improvements underway in the basin. The many partnering sessions and briefings held during the trip allowed the Commission to learn from the processes executed in the Ohio Basin and to share lessons learned in its management processes and oversight on the lower Mississippi.





Sunday, August 14, 2005

373rd Session of the MRC

The 373rd session of the Mississippi River Commission commenced on August 14 in Huntington, W.Va., on board the motor vessel *MISSISSIPPI*. The members of the Mississippi River Commission present during the inspection of the Ohio River Basin included Brig. Gen. Robert Crear, who assumed command of the Mississippi Valley Division and became President Designee of the Mississippi River Commission on June 23, 2004; Hon. Sam E. Angel, reappointed as a member on November 15, 1999; Hon. R. D. James, civil engineer, reappointed as a member on April 16, 2003; Hon. William Clifford Smith, civil engineer, appointed October 22, 1998; and Brig. Gen. Bruce A. Berwick, member designee and Commander, Great Lakes and Ohio River Division since February, 2005. Col. Al Bleakley served as the non-voting Secretary of the Commission.

The Hon. John Paul Woodley, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil works and Lt. Gen. Robert Strock, Chief of Engineers, also attended portions of this historic trip.



The Commission did not hold public meetings during the inspection of the Ohio River Basin; however it conducted public open houses and tours of the *MISSISSIPPI* in Huntington, Cincinnati, Oh., Louisville, Ky., and Paducah, Ky. to educate the public on the water resource engineering activities along the Mississippi watershed. More than 2,000 members of the public attended the commission's open houses and public engagements.



Low-Water Inspection Trip Report

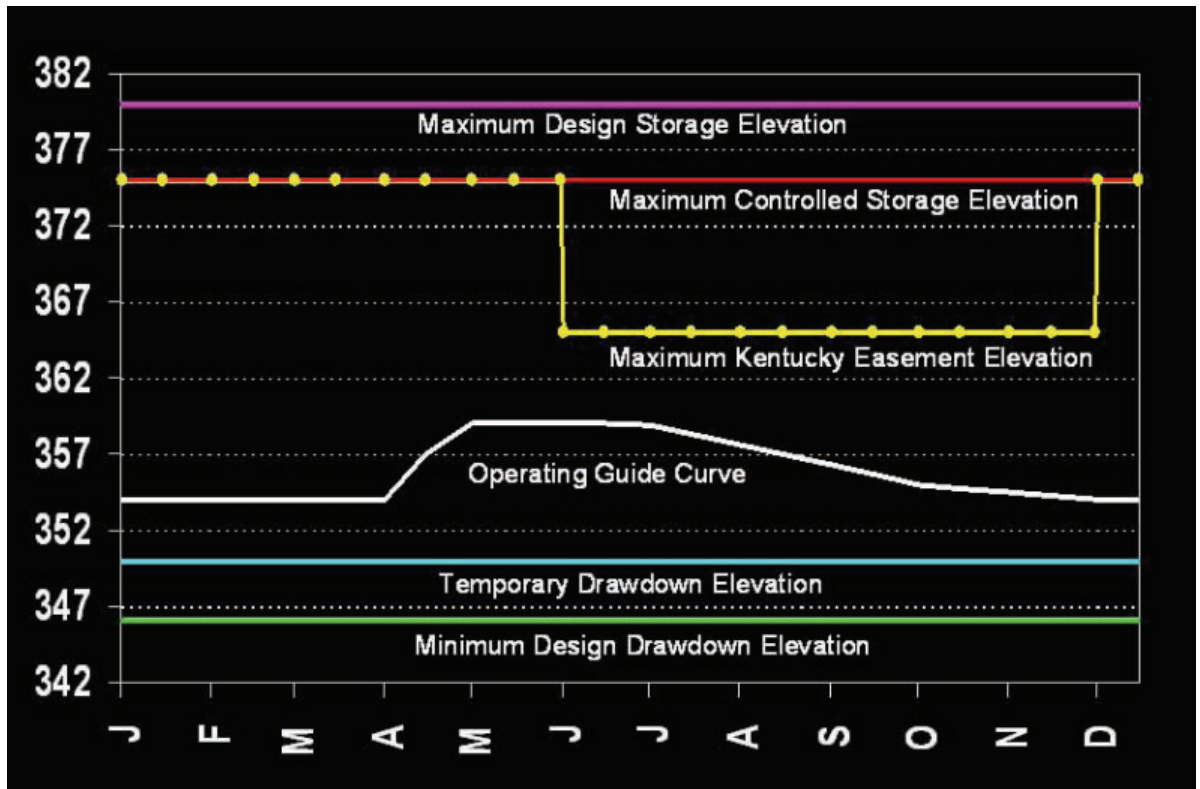
Sunday, August 14, 2005

373rd Session of the MRC

On Sunday, August 14, the Chief of Water Control provided the Commission with a detailed analysis of the ongoing severe low-water conditions on the lower Ohio and Mississippi Rivers due to a prolonged drought across much of the Mississippi valley, complete with a comparison of the current hydrograph with the hydrographs of other significant drought years in 1988 and 1997. The Commission was briefed on the multi-purpose reservoirs at Kentucky and Barkley lakes,

The August 2005 volume of flow at key gages on the river were at or near those experienced during the worst part of the 1988 drought when several daily low stages were set and major disruptions to navigation and river closures occurred.

The accomplishments in dike construction and other regulating works in the 17 years since 1988, however, had lessened the impact to the channel. This year, the river is expected to remain open to navigation with some minor delays being inevitable. The Commission also received briefings from the Pittsburg District Engineer and the Huntington District Engineer regarding activities, programs, successes and challenges in their areas of operation. The members also received a briefing on the Greenup Lock and Dam as the *MISSISSIPPI* approached the lock which provided a valuable view of the system being described.





Low-Water Inspection Trip Report

Monday, August 15, 2005

373rd Session of the MRC

The Commission arrived in Cincinnati and visited the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and received a tour explaining historical aspects of river life along the Ohio. Upon returning to the *MISSISSIPPI*, the Commission received briefings covering water management in the basin and achieving acceptable navigation



risk levels. Congressman Geoff Davis (KY-4th) also met with Commissioners, generals Crear and Berwick, and Assistant Secretary Woodley to discuss a variety of infrastructure and water resource topics. The Commission ended the day by accompanying Assistant Secretary Woodley to the Great American Ballpark to throw the ceremonial first pitch at that evening's baseball game.





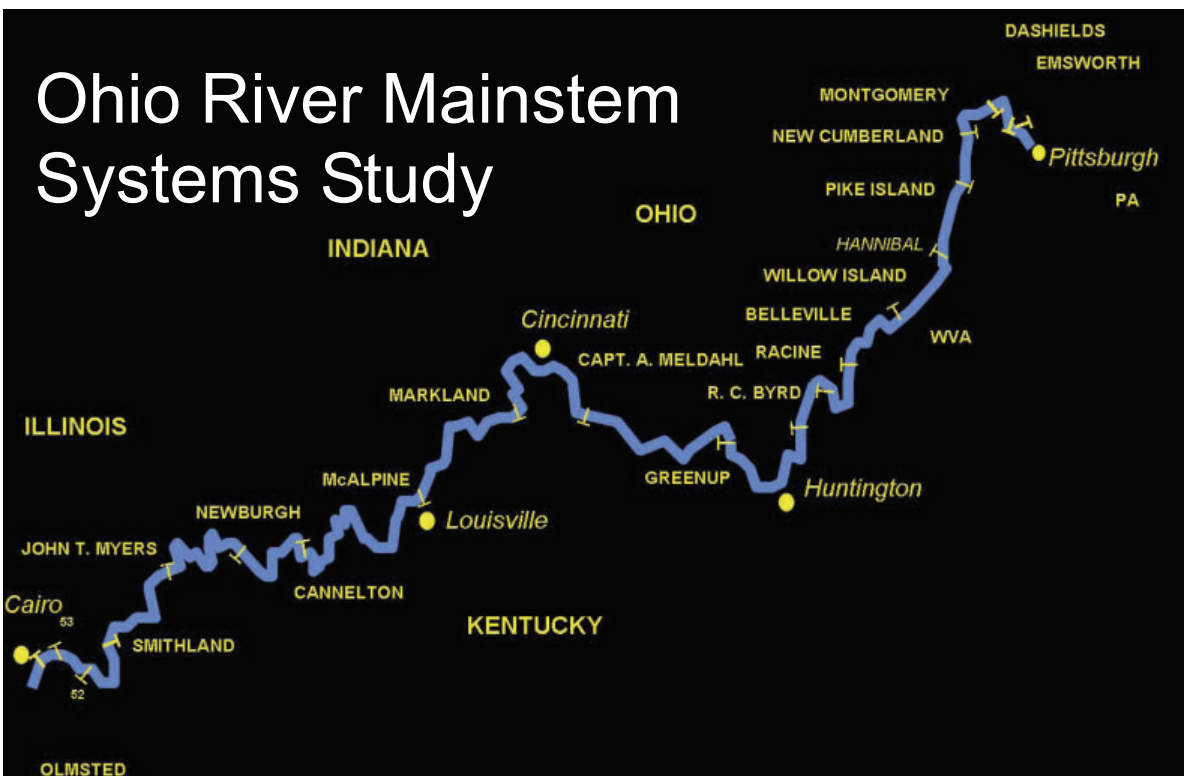
Low-Water Inspection Trip Report

Tuesday, August 16, 2005

373rd Session of the MRC

Louisville district staff and stakeholders briefed the Commission on a broad range of topics that included the Markland Major Rehabilitation Project, the Ohio River Main Stem Study System Investment Plan and Stewardship Program, the Hanover College River Institute program, the history of navigation on the Ohio River, the Ohio river Ecosystem Restoration Program, the benefits of watershed planning, risk-based decision making for flood control and navigation structures, and the McAlpine Lock Addition Program.

Following the briefings, the Commissioners inspected the Henry M. Shreve Gate Lifter, the McAlpine Lock and Dam, and the Falls of the Ohio River Interpretive Center.



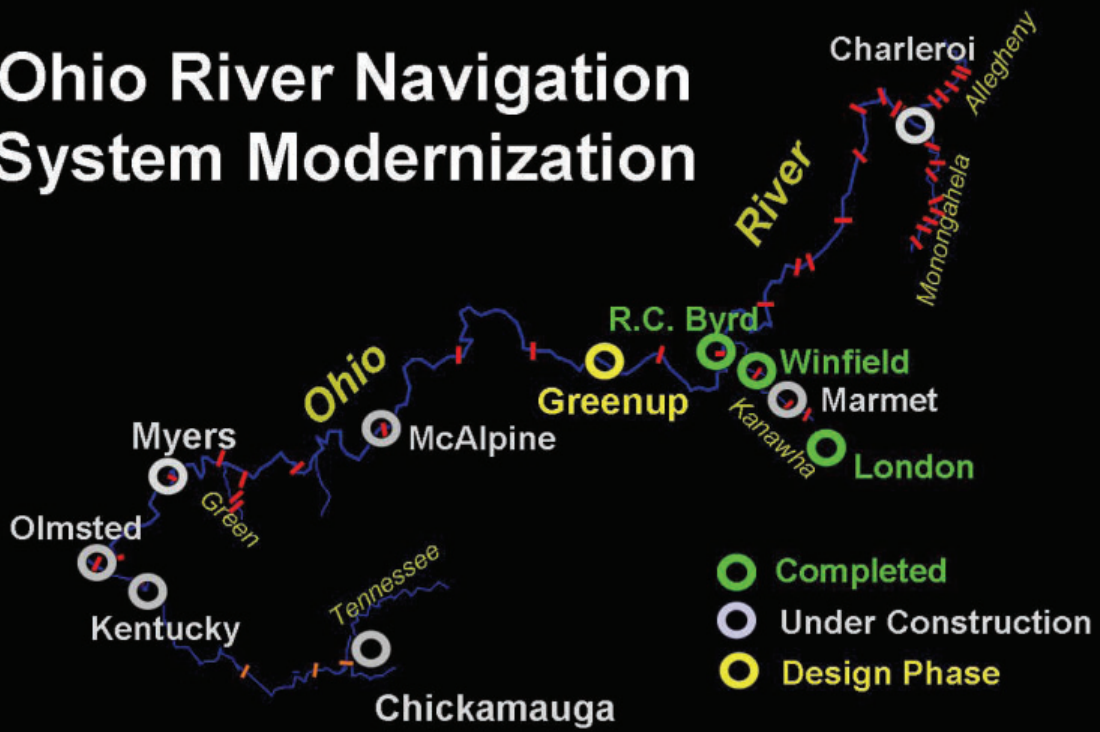


Tuesday, August 16, 2005

373rd Session of the MRC

Low-Water Inspection Trip Report

Ohio River Navigation System Modernization





Wednesday, August 17, 2005

373rd Session of the MRC

Louisville district staff provided the Commission with detailed briefings on recapitalization of flood control projects and the Olmstead Lock and Dam.

The Commission also hosted more than 120 partners and stakeholders on board the MISSISSIPPI as it travel from Cannelton Lock and Dam to the Southwind Indiana Port Commission in Mt. Vernon, IN.



Low-Water Inspection Trip Report



Thursday, August 18, 2005

373rd Session of the MRC

The Commission held a partnering session with approximately 75 regional stakeholders and Congressman John Hostettler (IN-8th). Following the session, the Commission met with members of the Indiana Port Commission and Ports of Indiana staff.



Low-Water Inspection Trip Report



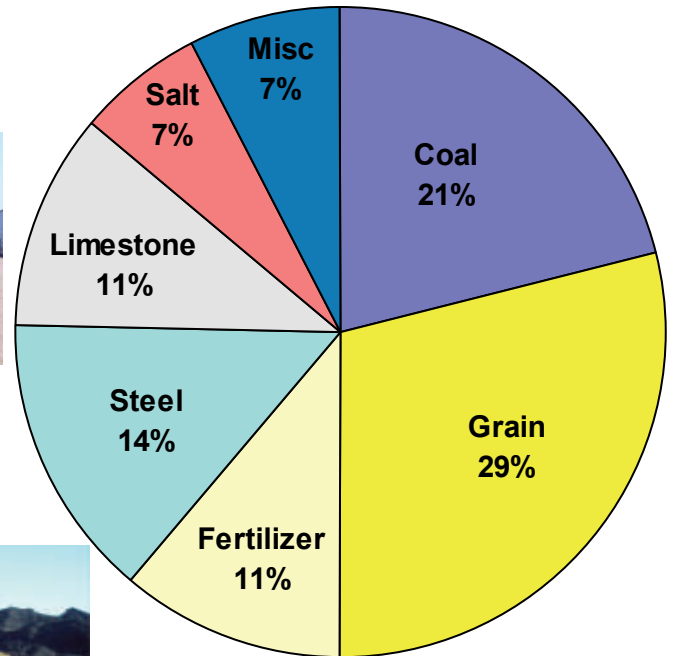
Low-Water Inspection Trip Report

Thursday, August 18, 2005

373rd Session of the MRC



2004 Tonnage Breakdown



As part of the briefing, the Commission heard that for 2004 ports of Indiana reported:

- Shipping up 35% to 7.6 million tons
- Highest tonnage volume since 1998
- Ports employment reached all-time high
- Burns Harbor set records for ship tonnage and vessels calls
- Mount Vernon set new steel mark, increased overall shipping 45%
- Jeffersonville recorded most rail movements in port history

The 2005 outlook for a the ports was also included in the briefing:

- System tonnage exceeding 2004 by 19%
- Mount Vernon tonnage up to 29% YTD
- Burns Harbor tonnage up 37% YTD
- Continuing development of security enhancements at all ports
- Pursing inland intermodal development
- Analyzing ports' economic impact

After a port site visit, the Executive Director of the Port of Pittsburg briefed the Commission on issues and challenges facing the navigation industry in the basin.



Low-Water Inspection Trip Report

Friday, August 19, 2005

373rd Session of the MRC

The *MISSISSIPPI* locked through the Smithland Lock and entered the Cumberland River and then locked through the Barkley Lock to enter the Tennessee River, which afforded the Commission the opportunity to gain some exposure of management practices on those rivers.

Upon reaching the Kentucky Lock and Dam, the Commission departed the *MISSISSIPPI* for a briefing and tour of the facility. Nashville District staff followed with informative briefings covering the Chickamauga Lock and the Tennessee

Valley Authority's activities and close coordination with Commission staff.

After docking at Paducah, the Commissioners visited the River Heritage Museum and then recessed for the weekend.





Sunday, August 21, 2005

373rd Session of the MRC

The Mississippi River Commission reconvened the 373rd session onboard the motor vessel MISSISSIPPI at Cairo, Ill. on August 21. The Commission held public meetings at Cairo; Memphis, Tenn.; Greenville, Miss.; and Morgan City, La. Approximately 285 people attended the public meetings, which provide a forum to exchange viewpoints and ideas between the public, the Corps of engineers, and the Commission. This process allows the public a greater voice in shaping federal policy on the river.

The members of the Mississippi River Commission present during the low-water inspection of the lower Mississippi River included: Brig. Gen. Robert Crear (President Designee), Hon. Sam E. Angel, Hon. R. D. James, Hon. William Clifford Smith, Col. Gregg Martin (BG-P), member designee and Commander, Northwest Division since July, 2005, and RADM Samuel P. DeBow of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Col. Al Bleakley served as the non-voting Secretary of the Commission.





Low-Water Inspection Trip Report

Sunday, August 21, 2005

373rd Session of the MRC

On Sunday, the Chief of Water Control provided additional updates on the low water conditions plaguing the Mississippi River. While the low water was causing some delays to the navigation industry due to the grounding of a small number of tows, the channel remained in fair condition and navigation remained open to traffic. Col. Charles Smithers, the Memphis District Commander, followed with a briefing to the Commission that detailed the status, schedules, and issues pertaining to the MR&T project within his area of operations. The Memphis District also provided an in-depth briefing detailing the status of the St. Johns Bayou-New Madrid Floodway project. The project, first authorized in 1954, is intended to close a 1,500-foot gap in the levee system to alleviate backwater flooding to homes, schools, churches, businesses, and extremely productive farmland, but is experiencing delays from lawsuits filed by national environmental organizations.





Monday, August 22, 2005

373rd Session of the MRC

The Commission held a public meeting in Cairo with approximately 85 members of the public in attendance.

Following the meeting, Brig. Gen. Crear signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the American Land Conservancy that formalizes the ongoing partnership between the two organizations which have joined on several projects to safeguard and enhance the region's natural, ecological, historical, recreational, and scenic heritage.

After the ceremony, the Commission met with members of the St. Johns Bayou-New Madrid Board to discuss the MR&T project feature. The Commission departed the motor vessel for a site visit and briefing of the Graveyard Slough Project in Tiptonville, Tenn., as well as a visit to the Caruthersville Outlet Ditches.



Low-Water Inspection Trip Report



Low-Water Inspection Trip Report

Tuesday, August 23, 2005

373rd Session of the MRC

The Commission visited the Mud Island River Park and Museum and received a tour of the museum describing the intricate to scale model of the Mississippi.

Afterwards, the Commission held a public meeting with approximately 102 members of the public in attendance.

After the public meeting, the Commission inspected the Chicot Pumping Plant in Lake Village, Ark., and a conducted a site visit of the new Greenville Bridge being constructed between Lake Village and Greenville.





Wednesday, August 24, 2005

373rd Session of the MRC

Col. Anthony Vesay, Commander of the Vicksburg District briefed the Commission on a number of MR&T-related issues and projects in his area of operations. The Commission followed with a public meeting with more than 56 members of the public in attendance. After the meeting, the Commissioners received a briefing and site tour of the new Greenville Bridge. The Commission then departed for an inspection of Mississippi River levee construction and a trip to the Tara Wildlife Reserve where they received an update briefing on the Yazoo Backwater Project, first authorized in 1941.



Thursday, August 25, 2005

373rd Session of the MRC

Col. Richard Wagenaar, Commander of the New Orleans District, provided a briefing to the Commission that detailed several MR&T studies and construction projects. Col. Wagenaar also informed the Commission that the district had been tracking Hurricane Katrina and making preparations in the event that storm became a threat to New Orleans. That evening, the Commission monitored Hurricane Katrina as it struck Florida and the Gulf of Mexico, prompting activation of the Mississippi Valley Division Emergency Operations Center.





Low-Water Inspection Trip Report

Friday, August 26, 2005

373rd Session of the MRC

The Commission held a public meeting in Morgan City with more than 40 members of the public in attendance.

Following the meeting, the Commission attended a ground breaking ceremony for the Leon Theriot Lock Project before concluding the 373rd session. The project is a component of the Larose to Golden Meadow Hurricane Protection Project.

The Commission and the Corps of Engineers have enjoyed a long and excellent relationship with the local sponsor, the South Lafourche Levee District.

