

# **SUMMARY REPORT OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER COMMISSION 2004 HIGH-WATER INSPECTION TRIP**

The following is an executive summary prepared for the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works and the Chief of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on the 2004 High-Water Inspection Trip of the Mississippi River Commission (MRC). The 367th Session of the Commission was held on board the Motor Vessel MISSISSIPPI from Caruthersville, Missouri, to New Orleans, Louisiana, during the period 19-23 April 2004.

## **Summary**

Interest and support for managing the water resources of the Mississippi River as a watershed and the role of the MRC in developing and operating projects on the Mississippi River and its tributaries remain high. The semiannual inspection trips and public meetings held by the Commission continue to be an effective means of building partnerships with local sponsors, informing the public, and receiving suggestions and requests from local sponsors and the public.

The MRC will provide reports of its proceedings and actions regarding the Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway System Navigation Feasibility Study; Upper Mississippi River Comprehensive Plan; the Louisiana Coastal Area Restoration Report; and other comprehensive watershed plans and studies to the Chief of Engineers.

## **Major MRC Efforts and Concerns**

- The nation cannot safely pass the project flood in the Mississippi Valley, which drains 41 percent of the US. The lower valley continues to be in flood danger due to an incomplete levee system.
- There is a high cost to delay in addressing the infrastructure and deteriorating coastal resources along the receding shore of Louisiana. The MRC recommends expediting the draft Louisiana Coastal Area Restoration Report and bill language in order to initiate critical restoration measures.

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### Mississippi River Commission Members

BG Don T. Riley, President  
Hon. Sam Angel  
Hon. R. D. James  
Hon. Wm. Clifford Smith

RADM Nicholas A. Prael (NOAA)  
BG Steven R. Hawkins (Great Lakes and Ohio River Division)  
BG William T. Grisoli (Northwestern Division)

## Operations and Maintenance

- Stop Logs -- The MRC is concerned about the inability to safely dewater lock chambers on the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers. The existing Poiree Dam dewatering system is no longer considered fit for service or economically rehabilitated to meet current Hydraulic Steel Structures (HSS) requirements. The only reliable and safe method to dewater most locks for an emergency repair is to construct earthen dams above and below the locks that may increase the lock downtime by several months. The least costly and most reliable replacement of the existing Poiree Dam systems is with stop logs (bulkheads) and, at most locations there is also a requirement of cutting of slots for the stop logs. Fifteen million dollars is required to procure the necessary stop logs for immediate needs and an additional \$50M is required over the next 6 years to cut necessary stop log slots for required planned maintenance and emergency repairs.
- Infrastructure -- The MRC is concerned about the low level of Operations and Maintenance (O&M) funding for the large, and complex completed works program. Some of the structures are 70 years old and have exceeded their design life. Recent O&M funding has been at levels insufficient to permit the required and critical maintenance for the aging infrastructure. Inadequate funding is causing the O&M General Maintenance Backlog and the Mississippi River & Tributaries Maintenance Backlog to grow to \$538M and \$216M respectively. Many project features are considered to be near failure. Examples are the gates at Lock 19 and the gate lift machinery at Lock 27. Without an increase in the O&M funding for critical repairs and rehabilitations, an economically costly failure is expected.
- Dredging -- The MRC is concerned about the lack of available funding in the Fiscal Year 2004 O&M budget to allow for required dredging for navigation. For predicted dredging requirements based on average year requirements of the most recent 5 years to meet the most critical dredging needs, the New Orleans District deep draft requirements are approximately \$30M, the Vicksburg District Ouachita River requirements are \$1M, the St Louis Mississippi River requirements are \$3.4M, and the Rock Island District Illinois River requirements are \$2M. Without additional 2004 dredging funding, navigation on some or all of these systems will be either completely shut down or severely curtailed which, in turn, will negatively affect local, regional, and national economies.
- “Low-use Waterways” -- The MRC does not concur with the concept that “low-use” waterways should receive less O&M funding than “high-use” waterways. These “low use” waterways are fundamental components of the Nation’s total waterway system. They are vital to the development of regional economies that are feeder waterways to the “high-use” waterways that ultimately increase the economic efficiency of the entire waterway system.

- The Ouachita-Black River project in Arkansas and Louisiana and the Kaskaskia River project in Illinois have both been classified as low-use navigation systems and the Fiscal Year 2005 O&M budget includes zero funding for operation and maintenance to maintain navigation for both systems. The Ouachita-Black System has four manned locks and dams and requires dredging, while the Kaskaskia River System has one lock and requires dredging necessary for commercial navigation. These authorized navigation projects contribute to local, regional, and national economies. If the needed navigation funding for these projects is not provided, many jobs will be lost (for example, one refinery is entirely dependent on barge transportation); local water supplies will be lost; and transportation costs and safety risks will increase due to the commodity movement by other means. The Monroe/West Monroe, Louisiana, area port has previously announced plans for a \$21M expansion for even greater use of the river. The MRC recommends that funding for navigation be included in the Fiscal Year 2005 budget.
- Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway System Navigation Feasibility Study -- The MRC supports the decision to publish the draft report for public review with a preferred alternative. The MRC supports the environmentally and economically balanced and sustainable approach of the current draft report.
- Water Supply – MRC considers it prudent that the Federal government place emphasis on actions to prevent a looming crisis situation with water supply in the Delta region of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi and Tennessee. Ground water supply in both the alluvial and Sparta aquifers is reaching a critical state due to demands of agriculture and aquatic, industrial and municipal water supply, ecosystem sustainment and salt-water intrusion. Surface water quantities in the region's rivers are adequate to mitigate the ground water crisis, but infrastructure is not developed to place waters such that they are useable. There is great potential to meet flood control needs, restore ecosystems, reduce fuel consumption, and increase crop yields while reducing farmed acreage in concert with provisions for implementing a water supply infrastructure in these regions.
- Environmental Operating Principles -- The MRC is committed to successfully incorporating the Environmental Operating Principles in the Commission's decision-making process. The current development of an ecosystem center of expertise in Mississippi Valley Division (MVD) will assist the nation in balancing complex demands. The Lower Mississippi Environmental Program established in 1982 provides environmental information to support the design, construction, and operation of the Mississippi River Levees and Channel Improvement features of the MR&T Project.
- Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) – The cooperative work of the TVA with the MVD and Great Lakes and Ohio River Division staffs to modify the TVA plan to resolve the previously expressed concerns about adverse impacts of the TVA's

Reservoir Operations Study on flood control and navigation on the Lower Mississippi River is acknowledged and appreciated.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- The MRC recommends HQUSACE review the major rehabilitation program policy for repair of deteriorated concrete.
- The MRC recommends review and revision of the budgetary limits for funding “low-use” waterways below the designated “billion-ton miles”. A more appropriate system should be developed which allows for consideration of benefits, return on investment, etc.

### **General Themes Resulting from Public Meetings**

- Maintain a funding level of MR&T to complete the critical deficiencies in Main Stem Mississippi River Levees as requested by the Louisiana and Mississippi Levee Boards to reduce the risk of catastrophic flooding in the Lower Mississippi Valley.
- Lower Mississippi River Resource Assessment (LMRRA) – MRC noted comments of USGS, USFWS and others concerning funding of the authorized study (WRDA 2000, Sec 410). The Administration has not included funding for this study nor has Congress appropriated funding. Considerable Corps resources from a variety of projects and programs over many years have been directed toward collecting data on the lower Mississippi River. This has resulted in an extensive database that includes significant environmental data. This database has proven valuable in implementing improvements to the river in concert with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Environmental Operating Principles and provides an excellent information platform. The MRC will continue to monitor the collection of data on the lower Mississippi River and to implement programs and make recommendations in an environmentally sensitive manner that will provide input to the LMRRA if funded.
- Recreation -- The regional community benefits of flood control reservoirs are significant. Recreational revenue provides a significant impact to the regional economy. The MRC notes that the extensive use of the reservoirs by the public is largely due to the excellent services provided by the existing recreation facilities. However, these facilities have not been maintained to past standards due to a shortage of O&M funds. The MRC supports providing needed O&M funds. The MRC also supports proposed legislation that would direct more funds collected by user fees to the sites where the fees are collected. The MRC continues to monitor the use of flood control reservoirs as it balances with the authorized flood control mission.
- The MRC received comments and cautions concerning

- The US Army Corps Business line approach to budgeting
- Performance Based Budgeting
- Civil Works Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2004-09 guidelines for provision to prioritize work based on performance.

The comments cautioned the Federal government to guard against providing flood control for the wealthy at the expense of the poor. Statements made:

- *“a home is a home no matter what the value”.*
  - *“If a project has been authorized by the Congress, has a positive benefit cost ratio and is funded by Congress, it should be given equal consideration for construction”.*
- Flood control remains at the top of the agenda of needs for the majority of the people that live and work in the Mississippi Valley.