

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER COMMISSION 2004 LOW-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 Low-Water Inspection Trip of the Mississippi River Commission (MRC). The 368th Session of the Commission was held on board the Motor Vessel MISSISSIPPI from La Crosse, Wisconsin, to Houma, Louisiana, during the period 16-27 August 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.

Feedback from Meetings and Site Inspections

Infrastructure

Three programs or studies that ensure an operational inland navigation system on the Upper Mississippi River are: the Operations and Maintenance (O&M) programs; the Major Rehab Program; and the Upper Mississippi, Illinois River System Navigation Study. Each of these programs deals with an aspect of a fully functional system. All are essential to maintain a reliable system. By reducing or eliminating any one of these, overall system reliability will be diminished or lost and the operation and use of the system as a whole jeopardized.

1. The O&M program handles the normal operation and maintenance of these inland facilities, but it continues to be drastically and dangerously under-funded, increasing the risks for system-wide failures due to the inability to address even minor maintenance responsibilities. Deferred O&M accelerates "break down" repairs and degrades project performance (reliability).

Mississippi River Commission Members

*BG Robert Crear, President
Hon. Sam Angel
▲ Hon. R. D. James
▲ Hon. Wm. Clifford Smith

*BG Steven R. Hawkins (Great Lakes and Ohio River Division)
*BG William T. Grisoli (Northwestern Division)
*RADM Samuel P. De Bow (NOAA)

* designee's

Formatted: Portuguese (Brazil)

Formatted: Portuguese (Brazil)

2. The Major Rehabilitation Program consists of major project restoration of structural work which will significantly extend the physical life of the feature and has a positive benefit cost ratio. The structures have deteriorated over time beyond the scope of the normal O&M program due to freeze/thaw cycles, corrosion, fatigue/use, barge impacts, and concrete deterioration.

3. The Upper Mississippi Illinois River System Navigation Feasibility Study looks at the future traffic needs on the system.

Each of these programs is essential to continued reliability and efficiency of the entire system. Presently the Major Rehab Program does not address all major aspects of the navigation structures (i.e., Portions of the dam are not covered and are required to be carried by the O&M program which does not have adequate funding to cover this type of rehabilitation project).

Additionally, budgetary constraints have impacted the essential funding of these major rehabilitation efforts. These constraints include categorizing major rehabs as "new start construction" items, effectively excluding them not only from being budgeted, but impacting funding during the appropriation process. Clearly, these efforts should not be categorized or defined as 'new starts' on facilities that have been completed and in some cases have exceeded a design life of 50 years.

There is serious concern by engineers and local businesses and citizens over the lack of funding and lack of widespread recognition of the condition and importance of the Nation's water resource infrastructure and other water resources.

- Many structures have exceeded a design life of 50 yrs (built in the 1930's)
- Maintenance of navigable channel depths (without fluff)
- Coastal degradation and deterioration
- Water supply issues including aquifer depletion

The Upper Mississippi River Lock and Dam system is in danger of catastrophic failure due to postponed critical maintenance which would cost the Nation billions in economic and environmental damage and threaten national security.

A technical analysis will be performed to assure the Mississippi River & Tributaries levee system adjacent to the privately owned Len Small levee is not in danger of adverse impact due to the current height and future plans for the Len Small Levee.

Low use harbors significantly contribute to the strength of our waterway system and save the Nation millions of dollars in transportation costs, safety, and reduced traffic on overcrowded highways by large trucks.

Navigation

Strong public support exists for the **Upper Mississippi River - Illinois Waterway System Navigation Study** draft approach.

Many asked that the Corps start the long process of building and updating locks. *Ask you to advise the President that we move forward with the Corps proposed Navigation Study plan.*

Collaborative support of Navigation Study Draft from environmental and navigation communities. Support for S2470; H4785 was voiced. There was a majority of support of the draft preferred plan.

Lack of action for construction of locks will lead to economic and environmental damage. The industry reminded the MRC that over 40% of dollars in the Inland Waterway Trust Fund come from the Mississippi Valley region – only 15% have returned to this region. For the last 10 years we have experienced unplanned closures of the river because of neglected O&M needs of the system. Over the last 10 years we have lost 10% of the locking capacity per year (example of Lock and Dam No. 27) which leads to unreliability. During the course of this inspection trip the MRC noted closures at McAlpin and Lock and Dam number 27.

There is strong public support for the dual purpose plan. The collaborative process used in developing the UMR-IRR study report and preferred plan received strong support.

“Affluent societies are the only ones fortunate enough to have an environmental conscience.” Without a modern navigation system we risk the economic might that makes environmental restoration possible.

Several partners expressed concern over Performance based budgeting – some programs, such as navigation-- are being greatly impacted by the “required” environmental project features. Inclusion of these features results in a lower B/C ratio and causes a lower prioritization of essential projects.

Flood Control

The Mississippi River levee system is not complete and is not constructed to grade to protect the valley from the project design flood. If the Nation encounters a system-wide rainfall equivalent to the design flood or a hurricane entering the gulf coast before the system is complete, the potential exists for the loss of thousands of lives and billions of dollars in damage.

The threat of the Nation experiencing a devastating flood in the Mississippi Valley remains.

The Yazoo backwater reformulation is a balanced approach of flood control and environmental restoration.

There are concerns about development of private levees affecting and potentially impacting the MR&T Project system.

Environment

The MRC recognizes the national environmental and economic challenges associated with coastal erosion. The members inspected areas in Terrebonne Parrish, Louisiana and support the science based adaptive approach to restoring and protecting America's wetlands and coastal areas.

Environmental Management Program – Non-government organizations mentioned their willingness to participate as cost-sharing partners.

Many of the public and sponsors thanked the MRC for the opportunity to voice their concerns. *"It is a pleasure to have you host our remarks; we are pleased with the generosity and integrity of the MRC"*. Some mentioned that public participation in the environmental area did not occur until about 30 yrs ago. The public voice has become better and has expanded. Participants asked for the best science possible on all deliberations.

The public asked that the MRC assure Corps compliance with the process [National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and planning guidelines] and that the Federal government should guard against allowing special interest groups to sidetrack the authorized and appropriated needs of the Nation with single mission agendas.

Ground Water

Water is a major resource and an economic engine. Ground water depletion is a national issue. States are starting to control the overdrafts. It's time to address the issue of groundwater at the federal level. Fifteen years ago partners were directed to address this with the Bureau of Reclamation – we have a shortage of factual data. The MRC has been asked for guidance and leadership in making ground water conservation and management a national mission.

- States cannot perform beyond boundaries and many aquifers cross state lines necessitating federal involvement.
- Interstate commerce is a federal responsibility. Water supply is critical and must be addressed as a national mission performed by a water resource engineer based agency/organization.

Missouri River Master Manual

On March 19, 2004, the USACE finalized the Missouri River Master Manual. The MRC will remain engaged to assure the nation is informed of impacts and potential impacts on navigation on the Mississippi River system.

Policy Recommendations

There is a need to set up a means for cost sharing on environmental restoration projects so that non-government organizations and other federal agencies can participate in the cost with the USACE.

There is a need for a national level mission to address the state of the Nation's ground water and the increasing need to manage this vital resource that crosses state and national boundaries.

Closing Thoughts of Members

It is great to see partners and stakeholders working together. The MRC has learned more about the Upper Mississippi River and the region's needs. We listen, inspect, evaluate and partner as we develop plans and studies and recommend action to address a balanced approach to our Nation's watershed management and water resource engineering.

We always learn something from interaction with stakeholders and the public in general. Plans are important, but inspecting the progress, adapting to conditions and responding to those people "on the ground" delivers workable solutions for the Nation.

There is nothing like being on the ground and seeing and hearing the issues with and from informed local citizens. We are obligated to seek balanced solutions and will continue to do so. We pledge the support of the staff of the US Army Corps of Engineers and the MRC.

The public hearing process is unique, the comments are important and direct feedback from partners, stakeholders and the general public to the highest levels of government is extremely beneficial. This process provides great interaction between congressional, federal/state/local, non government organizations and the public.

Sustaining this process of listening, inspecting, responding and partnering promotes faith and confidence in our government.

Synopsis

- We celebrated the 125th Anniversary of the MRC.
- Seven public meetings -- La Crosse, WI; Dubuque, IA; Alton, IL; New Madrid, MO; Memphis, TN; Greenville, MS; Houma, LA
- Over 525 members of the public attended public meetings; 128 presented testimony

- On board: Mr. John Paul Woodley, Jr. (ASA CW), Dr. Mack Gray (Deputy Undersecretary for Natural Resources and the Environment), Congressman Marion Berry, and 17 Congressional staff members
- Our Districts hosted more than 1,900 people; in addition, the MRC hosted and interacted with more than 1,000 partners and local interests

The MRC performed site visits – Locks and Dams 11, 18, and 19, St. Johns Bayou New Madrid Floodway, Nonconnah Creek, Port of Memphis, Channel Improvement along the length of the Mississippi River, and the Louisiana Coastal area.