

Waterways

A publication of the Upper Mississippi Waterway Association

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State is shutdown, but...

Judge says dredging is critical

Now it's not just the waterway industry and its customers who say that water-borne commerce is critical to the economy; the Minnesota judge in charge of spending during the state's shutdown agrees. So Ramsey County District Judge Kathleen Gearin has approved the St. Paul Port Authority's request that dredging be allowed to continue in the St. Paul harbor. Initially work was stopped because Department of Natural Resources inspectors weren't around to supervise.

'Like highway repairs'

But Judge Gearin says dredging to keep barge traffic moving is like "emergency highway repairs."

And because the 'highway' moves vital products from much of the U.S. to world markets, organizations and individuals are continuing to push the White House for emergency supplemental appropriations to clear developing bottlenecks all along the Mississippi River.

No guarantees

Estimates say that this year's flooding brought an estimated 60 million cubic yards of sediment down the river creating a historically bad situation at the mouth of the river below New Orleans. As mentioned in previous editions of *Waterways*, ocean going vessels are already being draft-restricted. And the Corps has been warning since early this year that limited funds mean it is unable to guarantee standard widths and depths in critical areas.

Recently UMWA President Mark Caspers wrote*



(Above) The St. Paul Port Authority has been given the okay to continue harbor dredging despite Minnesota's shutdown.

to President Barack Obama urging him to ask Congress for the supplemental funds and has written to the Congressional Delegations of Wisconsin and Minnesota urging support for passage of the FY 2012 Energy and Water Appropriations bill that would appropriate \$1.028 billion for damage repair on the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers.

Others weigh in

Other groups also continue push for funds, including the Midwest Shippers Association, which told lawmakers that the flooding, "Has led to

Dredging to 3

From the Executive Director:

This is a copy of letter sent earlier this month to members of Minnesota's congressional delegation. A similar letter was also sent to Wisconsin's delegation.

Subject: Emergency Funding for Corps of Engineers Dredging.

This is a request that you support the FY 2012 Energy and Water Appropriations bill approved by the House Appropriations Committee and an amendment thereto, to provide \$1.028 billion in emergency funding to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to repair damage caused by recent storms and floods on the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers and to prepare for future disasters.

We understand this bill was approved by the House Appropriations Committee in mid-June and that the requested emergency funding is partially offset by a rescission of the remaining emergency High Speed Rail funding that was originally approved in the stimulus bill.

The nation's waterways, recently ravaged by natural disasters, need critical funding to allow the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to help restore damage caused by record flooding and high water.

Heavy rainfall that began in late February and continued until early May caused flooding to areas along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and their major tributaries; additional rains in June put additional strain on infrastructure as well as Corps budgets.

In an effort to move the emergency funding issue along, the New Orleans-Baton Rouge Steamship Pilots Association recently met with several Senators to focus on the need to secure \$95 million needed to restore and maintain the Lower Mississippi River deep-draft navigation channel. Authorized as a 45-foot project, this main connection to the Gulf has already been reduced to a depth of 44 feet and is expected to drop to 43 feet. The Corps stated that due to heavy siltation loads in the river, they may not even be able to maintain this reduced depth.

Rivermen know that as flood levels recede, the sheer volume of water coursing its way from the highlands through to southern Louisiana and the Gulf

will deposit even more silt and sediments that will require even more dredging to maintain the channel at its authorized width and depth. In an average year Corps dredges remove about 35 million cubic yards from the lower Mississippi, this year an estimated 60 million cubic yards of sediment washed into that part of the river. And, as the Pilots Association correctly states, this is not a Louisiana problem, it's a national problem.

It's a local problem too, since this year's high water flow has caused numerous dredge demands in the Corps' Saint Paul District which includes Minnesota. If the Corps is denied emergency funds and is forced to focus its already short budget on Gulf dredging, no money will be left to do routine and emergency dredging in the Saint Paul District.

The Upper Mississippi Waterway Association supports efforts of Gulf operators to obtain emergency Corps funding to keep the major deep-draft channel to the Gulf open; without it the nation cannot maintain annual export activity, much less achieve the doubling of export traffic over the next several years as sought by President Obama. Our members recognize, too, that without efficient and dependable Gulf access, the millions of tons of barge freight which depend upon that outlet for foreign destinations, including 10 million to 12 million tons annually from Minnesota, will be forced to seek other routes; most probably more expensive rail transport. Clearly, the Mississippi, at 1685 miles long is a significant part of a commercial navigation *system*, a low cost transportation route that benefits the economy as well as the environment.

Our members recognize that the Waterway Industry must support efficient operations at the Gulf of Mexico while, at the same time, support adequate maintenance and dredging at all critical points along the entire river as any weakness creates bottlenecks and inefficiencies over the entire system. Even as we ask your support for emergency congressional funding of specific Corps projects, we do so knowing that similar demands are being made by others for equally worthy projects. While this is hardly an event unique to today's circumstances, we feel compelled to remind our Washington leadership of the continued need to

Executive Director to 3

Executive Director from 2

recognize the Mississippi River as a *system* that depends upon the efficacy of each part to make possible the value of the whole.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mark Caspers
President

Other river related items...

- Once again this year UMWA members were leaders and supporters of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' "Adopt-a-River" program. Upper River Services and the Padelford Packet Boat Company not only supplied volunteers, but vessels as well, making the cleanup possible. The mid-June event collected what one reporter called, "mind-numbing amounts of garbage" from the banks after this year's flooding.
- District locks and dams have become tourist attractions this summer as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers hosts open houses for the public. On Saturday July 16, during St. Paul's 2011 Highland Fest, Lock and Dam 1 will be open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and during the Minneapolis Aquatennial the Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam will have an evening open house from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday, July 23. Lock and Dam 6 was opened to visitors during Trempealeau (Wis.) Catfish Days.
- Ingram Barge Company has received an industry leadership award for leadership in using the latest clean diesel technologies. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awarded the Southeast Diesel Collaborative award to Ingram last month.
- *Reuters News Service* says the Mississippi River infrastructure may turn out to be, "One of the nation's untapped reservoirs of energy." Reuters points to the 19 pre-applications which proposed hydro projects at locks and dams from Hastings, Minn., to Cairo, Ill.

Dredging from 1

unprecedented levels of siltation deposits that are now threatening to shut off America's most important waterway transportation system for exports of grain and commodities that feed consumers around the world."

'Start moving now'

Rick Calhoun, president of Cargo Carriers says the developing situation could hurt U.S. competitiveness in world markets. "We need to start moving now before the situation gets out of control," he says.

Alan Kemper, an Indiana soybean farmer and head of the American Soybean Association says his organization remains interested in a long-term plan to improve and maintain infrastructure on the river system, but is more concerned with the immediate need. He says last year soybean farmers exported 850 million bushels of beans.

"First and foremost, funding must be provided to allow the lower Mississippi River to remain fully open for commerce," Kemper says. "The inland waterways navigation system, especially the Mississippi River, is a vital asset in the movement of important commodities such as grain, steel, petroleum and aggregate materials."

Grounding is warning

And pilots on the lower Mississippi River say a vessel grounding in late June is only a harbinger of things to come, unless more dredging funds come soon. According to the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, the Crescent River Pilot's Association says that insufficient dredging means, "an irregular width and depth, causing extreme conditions." In FY 2010, the Corps spent \$119 to keep the Lower Mississippi dredged to minimum depths. But this year estimates say similar work would take about \$170 million and the Corps has been able to budget only \$84 million.

Things aren't any better on the Missouri River. For example, the Southeast Missouri Regional Port Authority came close to not having money to dredge its harbor last year when Cape Girardeau County signed over a block development grant to fund the cleanup. This year no funding is in place to do the dredging, despite record flooding and silting on the river.

*(See the Executive Director's column and a facsimile of the letter to President Obama on page 4 of this publication.)

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Dedicated to navigation and sound water resource management

June 28, 2011
The White House
President Barack Obama
Washington, DC 20500
E-mail submission via White House website

Dear Mr. President:

We join Waterways Council, Inc. and other commercial waterway interests in urging you to immediately submit to Congress a request for emergency supplemental appropriations to address dredging and other related needs caused by the unprecedented high water conditions on the entire Mississippi River system this year. The nation's waterways, recently ravaged by natural disasters, need critical funding to allow the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to repair damage caused by record flooding and high-water.

The same waters which caused this year's unrelenting flooding left in their wake waterborne siltation which accumulated in critical areas thereby decreasing the depth of water in which ocean-going vessels and river barge tows operate, forcing closures as well as weight and tow-size restrictions on the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Immediate channel renovation is necessary to accomplish your announced goal to double exports within the next few years.

While the Administration and Congress struggle with ways to reduce the deficit and restore the nation's economic health, ongoing domestic and foreign trade requires a healthy transport system to bring revenue to the Treasury, jobs to the economy and hope to the disheartened.

Sincerely,



Mark Caspers
President