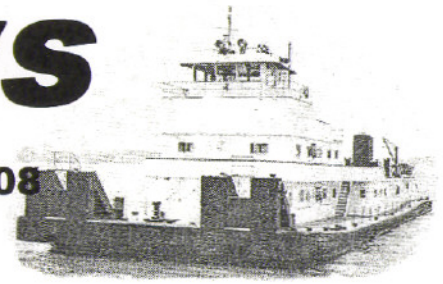


Waterways

Upper Mississippi Waterway Assoc.

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On the Ingram, reporter learns

Life in the Mississippi River lane

Sunday *St. Paul Pioneer Press* readers got a close-up and personal look at life on a river towboat in December. The Dec. 14, edition of the paper carried an extensive article by reporter Ellen Thompson who rode the Robin B. Ingram on its last trip out of St. Paul in 2003.

In addition to a primer on cargoes and capacities, the story talked about the challenges faced by crew members who have a work schedule of 28 days on and 28 days off.

"But the job also brings surprises, unexpected problems and, sometimes, danger," Thompson reported.

Ski stories

Stories related included one about a jet ski pulling a man on a tube which crossed in front of a tow. "The pilot saw only the jet ski emerge on the other side. The tube was tossed up and hung like a wreath against the leading edge of a front barge. The man who had been riding the tube was swept under the barge but managed to resurface."

According to the report the man insisted that nothing happened and refused to file a report. "The crew realized he was both drunk and nuts."

Crewmembers also talked about one of their most common problems during the summer season, careless recreational boaters. "A lot of people are ignorant of the rules of navigation," Thompson says.

She quotes Yarbro as saying, "If you look up toward the pilothouse, and you don't see me, then I can't see you."

He added that five whistles often sends pleasure craft, "darting back and forth all over the place because they don't know what to do."

Daily challenges

Next reporter Thompson talked about the hazards facing deck hands, even though, "Working on a towboat is statistically safer... than driving a truck or working on a freight train when loads and distances are compared.

"After this trip, the Ingram will not return up river until after St. Patrick's Day. That's when a

new shipping season traditionally opens on the upper Mississippi."

River changes

Thompson concludes by noting that pilot Floyd Yarbro knows what to expect then: "It's a world of difference, this river at different times of the year. You come up here with high water and you're well, not scared, but you're sitting on the edge of your seat. Your head is pounding and your stomach is tied up. You don't take your eyes off what you're doing. One little false move, and you've got yourself a mess."

Below: The Kiplinger Letter of Dec. 19, says America's Infrastructure is strained, struggling to meet demands on roads, bridges, water use, power plants, railroads, airports waste disposal systems, ports, etc. However the Letter's prediction for 2004 waterway funding, "Waterway shippers will just have to make do. There's just no money for expansion, even though more cargo is moving on U.S. waterways. Many locks and dams are old, and the \$1.5 billion a year Uncle Sam spends barely covers required maintenance of the 238-lock transportation system."



From the Executive Director...

Russ Eichman

A recent publication of "Hot Issues" on the McKnight Foundation website deals with river politics, specifically, the Corps of Engineers and the Navigation Study. Given environmentalist-led delay tactics, I have a problem with those who refer to articles about the Navigation Study as "Hot".

TO MY MIND, hot issues are generally ephemeral in nature, requiring immediate attention to prevent some sort of calamity. Far from being ephemeral, the Navigation Study is now well over a decade old, and while it certainly needs immediate attention, non-attention will not result in something calamitous. Non-attention will simply wreck havoc with the environment, the economy, recreational boating, the nation's roadways and commute times, that's all. I would prefer to call this issue contentious.

Throughout, the article refers to rivers that have been dammed and altered by the Corps and emphasizes the scrutiny given to Corps projects nationwide. It describes an organization, the Corps Reform Network, as a collection of 100 groups of citizens frustrated with destruction caused by Corps projects to rivers and coastal areas. It states that the Network is concerned about questionable economic justification and waste of taxpayer dollars as well as dubious decision-making that is too often driven by political considerations.

It then recites that Congress and non-governmental organizations are creating their own forums to examine the Corps' operations. I can understand that certain federal agencies and non-governmental organizations may seek to improve their already overblown status by slapping the Corps around. But Congress? Get real!

CONGRESS IS already in control of Corps projects by virtue of an elaborate and extensive multi-step Planning Process in

which the Corps must: identify the problem and opportunities, must inventory and forecast resource conditions, must formulate, evaluate and compare alternative plans, and, lastly, must select a recommended plan. And, most important, it must make its recommendation to Congress.

CONGRESS THEN goes through an extensive internal process to either accept or not accept the Corps' recommendation. Then comes the issue of funding. If Congress accepts the Corps' recommendation it will authorize and appropriate funds for that project. As an aside and a good example of their control over funding, consider that while Congress authorizes many projects, they do not fully fund them all. A case in point, and one very much a part of the Navigation Study, is full funding of the Environmental Management Program (EMP). The latest incarnation of that program has legislative authorization of \$33 million per year, yet despite urging from commercial navigation and environmental interests only a portion of that amount has been appropriated. Oh, and what happens if Congress doesn't like the Corps' recommendation? Well, put simply, Congress does not accept the recommendation and the run-amuck-Corps is stopped dead in its tracks.

GIVEN THIS process then, how can Congress credibly accept arguments from the disgruntled, for legislation that would restructure the Corps to allow for the intervention and oversight by other agencies, when the Corps, while engaged in congressionally authorized programs, (the only ones the Corps can do, by the way) is simply carrying out the will of Congress in the first place? Further, it seems to me that we should all be reminded that it is Congress that was given constitutional authority to monitor federal agencies and programs. And, as such, Congressional oversight of federal agencies is a tenet so fundamental that it cannot be changed by, and for the benefit of, the mischievous. To do as urged, Congress would give to others the

very oversight authority for which they, themselves, are responsible.

If you'd like to take a look for yourself, here's the web address: <http://www.mcknight.org/hotissues/>



Dakotas suit want to go to U.S. high court

South Dakota and North Dakota want to take the Corps of Engineers to the Supreme Court of the United States alleging mismanagement of the Missouri River. On Dec. 30, the two states asked the court to hear their 2002 case which says that the Corps favors navigation over recreation.

N.D. Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem says he's asking the court to review the federal appeals court decision that allows the Corps to release water from Dakotas reservoirs to maintain flows needed for navigation. Stenehjem alleges that the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals misinterpreted at 1944 federal flood control act.

The S.D. Attorney General's office says the high court should hear the case because the Corps has unlawfully harmed fisheries.



NCGA wants Econ Alternative Six

The National Corn Growers Association has gone on record in support of Economic Alternative 6 in the Upper Mississippi/Illinois Waterway Navigation Feasibility Study. NCGA also urged more spending for environmental mitigation but didn't specify an alternative because, they say, the alternatives need to be more fully explored and quantified.

The Growers also urged the Corps to remain on schedule and complete the study next year so that Congress can authorize the needed upgrades and maintenance.