

# WATERWAYS

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In productive St. Paul session

## UMWA meets new MVD leader

Members of the UMWA Executive Committee had a chance to sit down with Brig. Gen. Robert Crear, head of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Mississippi Valley Division, Vicksburg, Miss., when he was in town recently.

The one-hour informal session covered a range of issues, including the long-delayed work on Lock and Dam 3, which UMWA President Lee Nelson told the general has both embankment and outdraft problems. Embankment collapse he said, could result in loss of pool.

### Funding close

Gen. Crear said the work came close to being funded, but because of the delay is now considered a "new start," something he and the Corps disagree with. He said UMWA members and other interested parties can help by communicating with elected representatives.

Crear said the Corps can tell congress about their capabilities without lobbying, but that it helps for representatives to hear from a diverse group about specific needs. He also suggested that the Corps and industry need to interact with more groups and individuals outside the industry as a way of expanding understanding.

During the conversation, Gen. Crear described as "significant" the backlog of under funded O & M projects in the



*Above: Brig. Gen. Robert Crear talks with UMWA members in St. Paul*

St. Paul District (and elsewhere).

"O&M is not sexy," Crear said. "And it's hard to show a return on investment (ROI)." Crear said that means that the Minnesota River, on a stand-alone basis, has a relatively poor ROI number.

### Good feeling on WRDA

On the positive side, Crear said his number one priority when meeting with congress in March was a water bill and that he left with the feeling there will be a Water Resources Development Act passed this year.

Another concern for Gen. Crear is the need for public relations and more information on what the Army Corps of Engineers does.

"Even the Army doesn't understand the Corps of Engineers," he said. "Overall we don't

have an advocate for water issues, especially at the administration level."

### Watch the neighborhood

Also at the meeting, Colonel Michael Pfenning, head of the St. Paul Division, reminded UMWA members that they are in the best position to help maintain river security. He said that even though the country has grown somewhat complacent after 9-11, security is something everyone on the river should be concerned about. He likened the effort to a "neighborhood watch" where residents keep an eye out for anything suspicious or unusual.

### High visibility for upper opening

This year's river opening, marked by the passage of the first tow through Lock and Dam 2 at Hastings, Minn., got quite a bit of attention. In addition to newspaper stories, there was coverage on three of the five local television newscasts. KARE-TV Channel 11 even sent it's helicopter to over fly the up-bound Teresa L. Wood, Marquette Transportation Co.

The Wood broke through several inches of remaining ice on Lake Pepin with her 15-barge tow early on Monday, March 28. Other boats close behind were the Magnolia and the Joseph Patrick

*Open cont'd on 2*

## Executive Director's Report...

Did you know that the Mute Swan, an elegant white creature that conjures up images from *Fantasia* and other Disney-produced film spectacles, is defined by the Fish & Wildlife Service as an exotic species and *persona non grata* in our wetlands?

Distinguished by a pronounced black ridge at the top of its bill, concentrations of mute swans, so the story goes, overgraze submerged grasses thereby eliminating food and habitat for fish and other wetland dependent species. "Normal" swans [apparently] don't do that, meaning that Mute Swan numbers must be controlled.

This fact was repeated at a mid-March meeting of the Mississippi River Citizen Commission in Bloomington, Minn., which included presentations by the Fish & Wildlife Service, among others. While that bird is listed as an "alien invasive species" on many websites, interestingly the Fish & Wildlife Service's site contains no such reference.

Confused by what constitutes an invasive-species, I did a little investigating; here's what I found.

According to The World Conservation Union (IUCN) in Switzerland, whenever a species is found outside of its natural range, it is considered alien and a threat to native plants and animals. Apparently, the underlying objective of conservation groups is to preserve native species in their current location to the exclusion of all others. The trouble with this is that nobody seems to agree on what is 'native'.

In "*An introduction to the human dimensions of invasive alien species*", Jeffrey A. McNeely traced the movement of early humans from Africa to Europe, thence to Australia, the Americas and the far reaches of the Pacific starting more than 100,000 years ago. During this migration, humans took with them dogs, pigs, yams and at least 30 species of plants; plus rats and lizards as stowaways. As competitors and predators, these aliens

[including early humans themselves] invaded almost every type of native ecosystem and caused hundreds of extinctions. And this was more than a millennium before European exploration and settlement added to the mix.

After the passage of so many generations, the genesis of a pig or yam didn't matter much, so long as it provided a meal, and the concept of 'native' or 'imported' was not yet part of the human understanding.

Today's pattern of global trade promises to complicate, not clarify the issue. The U.S., for example, imports plants, trees, live fish and cute critters for household pets as part of the combined \$13 billion annual pet and landscape industries. In turn the U.S. nursery industry offers nearly 60,000 plant species to the global market.

Describing other instances McNeely claims that "[F]ishermen value the cultural importance of alien species of trout in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of the American West, despite the powerful negative impact they have on native frog species."

Continuing, the author relates that the St. John's Wort, a noxious weed with harmful effects on livestock in North America, is gaining popularity in the natural pharmaceutical trade as an anti-depressant and is grown legally as an agricultural crop in the Northwest. "Thus the noxious invasive of one cultural group", says the author, "is the desirable addition of

other groups." Complicating this is the harsh reality "...that we can never be certain about the behavior of an alien species imported into a new environment."

Expectedly, solutions offered by IUCN are numerous and complex, but with one common theme: unless the species has an extended history of being here, it doesn't belong.

Somehow, the ballet Swan Lake seems to have lost its innocence.

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### Open cont'd from 1

Eckstein, each pushing eight barges.

The Upper River Services boat Itasca with a full load of dignitaries ceremonially opened the season in St. Paul after leaving Lambert's Landing and sounding the traditional long blast on the air horn. Among the riders were Minnesota Lt. Governor Carol Molnau, (Also DOT Commissioner) and Colonel Michael Pfenning, head of the Army Corps of Engineers St. Paul Division.

The Corps says the average opening date over the last 30 years is March 20. In 2004, the first tow to make it to St. Paul was the Reggie G., owned by Alter Barge Line, of Bettendorf, Iowa, on March 20.

*Below: The Mary J works, while Itasca hosts VIPs for the March 28 opening*

