

WATERWAYS

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June 2006

As committee aides try to 'hotline' bill

Another bipartisan push for WRDA

As UMWA members well know, it was the original intent of the U.S. Congress to reauthorize a Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) every other year. Despite those good intentions, there hasn't been one since 2000.

However, this week there's another bipartisan effort in the Senate to get members to agree to limit amendments on the current WRDA legislation. Aides to the Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee are asking that the bill be "hotlined" through the Democrat and Republican caucuses as a way of limiting the number of offered amendments to eight or nine.

Amendments listed

The list of proposed amendments early this week included four by Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Russell Feingold (D-WI) on Corps of

Engineers changes.

Senators Christopher (Kit) Bond (R-MO) and other members are filing amendments designed to be alternatives to the McCain/Feingold amendments.

Hope remains that the bill may be out of committee(s) and available for senate floor action yet this month.

Great Lakes need WRDA

Meanwhile, another group has weighed in on the need for a bill this year. The Great Lakes Maritime Task Force, a coalition of carriers, ports and labor groups, says shallow river drafts are forcing lighter loadings and driving up costs.

They say that lack of maintenance dredging on the St. Marys River is causing a seven percent reduction in payloads going through the locks at Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. That translates into higher costs of raw materials for steel makers already struggling to

compete in a tough world market.

The group says depths at Indiana Harbor, Ind., are a full four feet shallower than their authorized depths.

Coming up short

Group spokesman Glen Nekvasil says it would cost \$200 million to dredge Great Lakes ports to commercial depths, but the fiscal 2007 budget has only \$86 million. For that reason, he says, members are going to congress to talk about a "dredging crisis" and push for WRDA. Nekvasil says shallower rivers translate into lost efficiencies for transportation and less competitive American products on world markets.

USDA says cropland soil erosion is down

Total soil erosion is down, especially in the nation's mid-section, according to Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns. Figures from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Inventory, a statistical survey, show that the Missouri River and Upper Mississippi/Souris-Red-Rainy River Basins had the most significant reductions in total soil erosion between 1982 and 2003. (*Upper Mississippi shown left*) Those areas contain more than 50% of U.S. cropland.

The survey showed that the Upper Mississippi/Souris-Red-Rainy Basin erosion fell 2.5 tons



Soil cont'd on 2

Executive Director's Report...

Port Security

Here's an anecdote that touches /on safety, port security, terrorist attack and just about any other item of contemporary paranoia you care to plug in. In mid-May, there was an accidental release of a caustic chemical from a railcar up-wind of our St. Paul office.

A TV news report that evening suggested the spill responsible for the evacuation of all human life within 2-miles down-wind of the incident was hydrogen chloride, a strongly corrosive acid. But considering that the same news report misidentified the industry where the incident occurred causes me to question other details of the report.

Poor news reporting aside, however, this event occurred at a time when the Department of Homeland Security is proposing huge changes in the way people gain access to areas of economic and security importance.

Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC)

In May, the Transportation Security Administration and the U.S. Coast Guard published proposed rules which would impose an identification system for transportation workers: TWIC. Four informational public meetings are scheduled; midwestern readers of this paper will likely attend the June 6th meeting in St. Louis. Deadline for filing public comments is July 6.

Among other things, these rules seek to amend regulations to require the use of the TWIC as a required control measure to access vessels or facilities. In keeping with current events and the unsettled state of global politics, the proposed card is no lightweight, ordinary, run of the mill, flash card. It is a "smart card" containing the photo, name, biometric information and multiple fraud protection measures. However, the dossier collected and housed by TSA will contain far more information: the workers' biographic information including 10 fingerprints, name, date of birth,

address, phone number, alien registration number, photo, employer and job title.

Price tag for smart card

The price tag is no lightweight either. TSA estimates that workers would pay about \$149 for a TWIC, but workers already vetted would only pay about \$95. Cost to the estimated 750,000 workers needing a TWIC card lasting 5-years will be upwards to \$111 million, some of which will probably be paid by current employers and included in their cost of having qualified people on hand to do business.

Price tag for card reader

The proposed smart cards require a smart card reader, reader software, reader installation, operator knowledge and recordkeeping, just to name the obvious. According to information published in the Federal Register, the initial cost *per reader* will be about \$10,400, made up of \$4,700 for reader and software with another \$5,700 for operator knowledge and required paperwork.

Sites with multiple readers can hopefully spread expense for operator knowledge and paperwork over all units, thus reducing overall site cost.

Total economic costs

Department of Homeland Security estimates the total economic costs of proposed rules over a 10-year period to be \$1.8 billion. The other side of that coin, says DHS, is that the rules facilitate commerce by streamlining the number of credentials and access control procedures and increases security at vessels and facilities by reducing the number of high-risk people with unescorted access to secure areas.

Overkill?

Of the estimated 750,000 workers required to hold a TWIC, only a total of 45,000 are in the barge operator and the land-based cruise sectors. The remaining 705,000, according to the Federal Register, include Merchant Marine license holders, liquid bulk refiners, port truck drivers, railroad person-

nel, contractors, longshoremen, shipyard workers and those involved in vessel operations.

The small percentage of workers in the brown-water and land-based cruise sectors (6%) has prompted some to suggest that the proposed rules should differentiate between inland and coastal waters, rather than to require all sectors, particularly those with a high expense / revenue ratio to make unrealistic and unnecessary investments in unproven technology.

As support for this argument, critics recall a recent event where a tugboat hit a bridge located in a shallow, brackish-water side channel. As a result of this unfortunate incident, the entire industry, including harbor operators, were ordered to have radar units on their boats. This, in spite of the fact that harbor operators seldom have use for radar, and that, when used, boat vibration often knock radar units out of operation, making them useless.

Small businesses not overlooked

At this time, DHS says they have not yet determined if this proposed rule would have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. If you are a small business with questions or are concerned about options for compliance you can call DHS (LCDR Jonathan Maiorine, Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard, 1-877-687-2243). "DHS," according to the Federal Register, "will not retaliate against small entities that question or complain about these rules."

Soil from 1

per-acre, per-year.

"This remarkable decrease in soil erosion can be attributed to the extraordinary efforts by America's private landowners to conserve and protect agricultural lands," Johanns says in a USDA release. "This report underscores the value of cooperative conservation through partnerships with our farmer and ranchers, who are among the best stewards of the land."