

# WATERWAYS

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## New hope for much needed legislation

# Senators want WRDA vote 'soon'

Senator Kit Bond (R-Mo) is predicting a vote on the Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA) by, "the end of June." He also says he has White House assurances that the administration and the Office of Management and Budget will not try to block the bill. Bond's predictions came at a press conference early this month hosted by the National Corn Growers Association, MARC 2000 and the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America.

Also at the event were Sens. Dick Durbin (D-Ill), Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) and Jim Talent (R-Mo). Bond says he doesn't have a date for floor debate on WRDA, but says it will be soon and hopes that means by Memorial Day.

### **Brazil moving ahead**

As UMWA has often pointed out, Sen. Grassley reminded reporters that Brazil is now transporting soybeans on vessels especially designed to take advantage of the deeper draft on the Amazon River system in South America. He said the Brazilian efforts to improve their farmers access to world markets, "puts what we have to shame and brings emphasis to the fact that if we don't modernize and improve what we have on the Mississippi River, we are not going to be able to compete with what they are doing there."



*(Above) Chinese buyers, talking with CHS's Clint Gergen, want Midwest beans and know the river system is the most cost efficient way to move them*

National Corn Growers Assoc. First Vice President Ken McCauley told reporters, "Our transportation infrastructure on the Upper Mississippi and Illinois rivers is working on borrowed time. The infrastructure is almost 20 years past its life expectancy. If our trade goals are to be fully realized, we must have a modernized and efficient river transportation infrastructure to secure our global and competitive future."

### **Interstate commerce**

Sen. Talent said, "This is interstate commerce on the navigable rivers. James Madison would say this is the responsibility of the federal government - it's just a matter of whether we are going to live up to it or not."

Congress hasn't passed a

Water Resources bill since 2000 and Bond says it's time to act. "We've waited long enough. We want to make sure we get this on the calendar."

### **White House promise**

About possible opposition from the Bush administration, Sen. Bond said, "I talked to the president and vice president, we talked last summer. I came away with the clear promise that they were not going to be taking any steps to interfere with the passage..."

The House has already passed a companion bill (HR 2864), and more than 80 senators have signed a letter to Majority Leader Bill Frist urging early consideration of WRDA.

## **Executive Director's Report...**

### **Pool drawdowns**

A decade ago, the Corps of Engineers completed a preliminary evaluation of using water level management as a tool for habitat restoration. After considering several options that included isolating backwater areas with dikes and using gate adjustments and water flow to improve habitat, it was concluded that seasonal, partial drawdown of navigation pools held the greatest promise for benefiting large areas of habitat.

### **1990s drawdowns**

Responding to concerns that stable water levels within Upper Mississippi River navigation pools allowed sediments to smother shoreline and shallow-water plants necessary for food and habitat, trials were conducted in Pools 5 and 10 throughout the 90s. Then, armed with information about sediment drying and vegetative response from these small scale (25 acres or less) drawdowns, Pool 25 near St. Louis was held almost 2 feet below normal for about a month during the summer of 1995, allowing more than 3,000 acres of shallow-water area to dry out.

### **Multi-agency initiative**

Through the River Resource Forum, a cooperative multi-state and federal organization within of the COE's St. Paul District, the Water Level Management Task Force was formed to address habitat restoration and other environmental issues. Consistent with the Corps' congressional mandate to maintain a 9-foot channel in the UMR, the Task Force agreed to lower the water level in identified navigation pools by upwards to two feet during summer months to expose more shoreline to host aquatic plants needed for habitat.

During the dryout at Pool 25, for example, annual aquatic vegetation grew well in the dewatered areas; upon reflooding in the fall, stands of new plants provided excellent food and cover for migrating waterfowl and fish, along with better water quality and

clarity. Drawdown of additional pools soon followed: Pool 8 in 2001 and 2002 and Pool 5 in 2005 – all producing hoped-for results. A second drawdown of Pool 5 is planned this June and other UMR pools are under consideration.

### **Maintain the 9-foot channel**

To maintain the congressionally mandated channel during drawdowns, the Corps surveys and, if necessary, performs advance maintenance dredging. In the case of back-to-back drawdowns of Pool 8 in 2001 and 2002, the Corps was able to advance dredge enough to maintain the channel over the course of the two drawdowns without exceeding the amount of money justified by routine maintenance dredging.

The Corps makes an important distinction about what drives the need for dredging. "We are not doing advance maintenance for a drawdown. We are doing advance maintenance to maintain the channel," said a COE spokesman.

Continuing, he said, "We have agreed to perform advance maintenance dredging that can be justified in terms of reducing future channel maintenance. In essence we are returning to our pre-1974 advance maintenance practice of dredging to a depth of 13' to get more longevity between events."

"Our current position is that we will not use O&M funding for dredging more than what we can justify as being advance maintenance. If a drawdown requires more than the justified advance maintenance, another funding source is necessary..."

### **Adaptive management is key**

Early observations of last year's drawdown of Pool 5 indicated that some mussel did not survive; apparently their beds dried out faster than they could relocate, resulting in the loss of an estimated 1 million. Reportedly, none were Higgins' Eye Pearly mussels, but some were thought to be protected species. However, since there is no definitive study indicating how many of what type of mussels are in any selected portion of the waterway, unintended collateral damage will, at best, remain an estimate.

Although the process lacks

both funds and time to conduct a mussel inventory prior to the second Pool 5 drawdown in June, the announced pace will be limited to 2/10 of a foot per day (or less) to the targeted 1.5 feet reduction in water level. This slower drawdown is expected to give mussels a chance to react to falling levels and/or give volunteers an opportunity to move them to deeper waters and hopefully avoid the mussel loss experience of last year.

All involved agree that adaptive management is a key element in maximizing limited resources while assuring successful restoration of critical habitat with a minimum of unintended damage.

We look forward to definitive reports.

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## **Missouri levels up a bit**

When Al Mazurowski of Cargill's Meteorology Department spoke to the Executive Committee in April, he mentioned that even a heavier than normal snow pack in the Rocky Mountains will be unlikely to help raise Missouri River levels this navigation season.

In their most recent report, the Army Corps of Engineers echoed that assessment. Rainfall and melting of low-level snow did raise levels in the Missouri River reservoirs by 6 inches to two feet during April, but runoff for the rest of the year is expected to remain below normal.

Larry Cieslik of the Corp's Omaha, Neb., office says the expected runoff for the rest of the year remains at only 83% of normal and that the overall snow melt peaked about April 15, at a point that was near normal.

Cieslik says the runoff peaked at 108% of normal in the area above Fort Peck and 88% from Fort Peck to the Garrison reservoir. Current storage in the six reservoirs on the Missouri system is 38 million square feet, or 19 million acre-feet below normal. That's expected to go up slightly to 38.7 million acre feet by the end of this month.