

Waterways

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At St. Paul ceremony...

Corps christens new barge

The St. Paul District brought all three components of its upper Mississippi River dredge fleet to downtown St. Paul in mid-May for the christening of the Quarters Boat Taggatz. Ceremonies were held at Harriet Island Regional Park, May 15. The next day the fleet was moved across the river for a public open house at Lambert Landing on the left descending bank.

Meaningful day

UMWA member Greg Genz says it was a beautiful day and a meaningful christening.

"It was especially meaningful to UMWA because a lot of the members knew and liked Bill Goetz and Harold Taggatz," says Genz. "One of the presenters at the dedication really hit it on the head when he said something like, 'You know, those two guys worked so close together in life and now you have the two pieces equipment named after them working on into the future together.' That really impacted the audience."

Replaces Thompson

The fleet replaces the Dredge William A Thompson, which worked the upper river for more than 70 years and is scheduled to become a museum.

Genz says he liked the fact that the ceremony was held in St. Paul.

"It really pointed up the fact that this is the St. Paul District and that the river is still a vital part of this area. And because the open house was held at Harriet Island, there were a lot of people walking up to visit –



Above: The new dredge fleet lines up at Lambert Landing. Photo Pete Verstegen, Corps of Engineers

there was a good turnout there. And I got the impression that the crew really liked interacting with the public and welcoming them on board."

The Corps says more than 400 people came aboard the vessels during the open house and had a chance to learn first-hand from the crew about the work of the fleet.

The fleet is moved on the river by the Mv. General Warren and on May 16 started a dredging project near the St. Paul Airport.

All three vessels are based out of the Corps' Fountain City, Wis., base. For more information on the St. Paul District visit www.mvp.usace.army.mil.

From the Executive Director.

Early Post-Mortem for the Ford Dam

A recent internet posting cheered the looming purge of commercial traffic from the Minneapolis harbor along with teardown of the Ford Dam.

The posting is an opinion piece lamenting the eons-old rapids that are now buried under deep water laid down by dams, first the Meeker Island dam in 1897, then the Ford Dam, aka L&D 1, in 1917.

The author argues that the eight-mile stretch of river gorge from St. Anthony Falls downstream to Ft. Snelling that was home to the rapids for nearly 12,000 years should be returned to its natural state to be enjoyed by kayakers, shutter bugs and sportsmen. With the Ford Dam gone, the newly awakened gorge “. . . would be an internationally recognized recreational and natural resource.”

Big Dreams are Necessary

We do our best to understand the need to dream big – it’s a first step to improving conditions that don’t fit a vision of how things should be. Then, too, we understand that all things were once new only to be found wanting and replaced by a succeeding generation of dreams, some big, some elitist.

So it was with the big dream Minneapolis had 50-some years ago to wrest from St. Paul the prestige of being the head of navigation on the Mississippi River. This project was conceived and completed because business and political interests of the day considered a commercial harbor essential for the wellbeing of Minneapolis. Lower barge rates would bring lower prices to the end-user along with a greater selection of markets for producers. Few, if any, saw that eliminating the rapids would add yet more distance to the unnecessary chasm between commercial and recreational supporters.

Environmental Trump Card

We find it unsettling that despite the 1986 finding by Congress that the Upper Mississippi River System is as much a prized commercial necessity as a national environmental treasure, playing the environmental trump card is acceptable to strengthen recreational arguments, but scorned when used by commercial navigation.

The prediction that the newly uncovered rapids will be instantly embraced by the recreational and environmental communities totally ignores commercial navigation’s positive contributions to cleaner air, reduced highway

congestion, environmental pollution and river safety.

Freight Must Move, Society Has Choice

Consider the truism that if a commodity does not move by barge, it will move via rail or truck. By extension, then, if construction gravel, for example, does not move to Minneapolis by barge from yards in St. Paul it will move by truck over already maxed-out highways and local roads.

If the lock and dam system were eliminated, an alternative to one barge of gravel would be 75 truckloads. Even at minimum demand, Minneapolis requires at least 350,000 tons of aggregates per season; that’s 233 barge loads

Society, then, has a choice to support the shipment of two hundred environmentally friendly barges, largely unseen on the river; or to find a way to handle more than 17,000 extra trucks each season. Every season.

Three independent studies have shown that when barge traffic is replaced by truck or rail more fuel is consumed, more exhaust contaminants are released into the air, roadway congestion shoots up to indefensible levels and highway maintenance costs are significantly increased. In short, loss of river transportation would have a dramatic negative impact on the economy, the environment and the quality of life.

Each Mode Has a Transportation Niche

And lest we be misunderstood, the barge industry is not anti-truck or -rail. On the contrary, intermodal transport of many river-borne commodities relies on the seamless interchange of freight from one mode to the other. Our point is that while each mode has its own niche and in its own way impacts the environment, barges have the lowest impact on all components of the ecosystem.

There you have it. Once again the commercial navigation has displayed the environmental trump card and if past is prologue, the environmental advantages of barges will most probably continue to be ignored. And, that’s too bad. For without impartial and balanced debate of the issues, we all run the risk of being a little less than we might otherwise be.

Little lock chamber is a big deal for boaters

As noted in an earlier edition of *Waterways*, the smaller auxiliary lock at Locks and Dam 15 in the Quad Cities area has reopened in time for the recreational boating season. It had been closed since 2003 because of worries about the strength of its miter gates.

Locks and Dam 15 opened for river traffic in 1934 and served as a prototype for the system of locks and dams on the Upper Mississippi River. It is the only dam on the river made up entirely of roller gates because its location makes it susceptible to ice and debris jam-ups. It also includes a power plant to operate the machinery, making it energy self sufficient.

The main lock is 110 feet wide by 600 feet long and the auxiliary lock is 110 feet by 360 feet. Both chambers have a maximum lift of 16 feet.

DNR wants fish passage

Upstream, Wisconsin DNR says it would like to see a fish passage included in the safety improvement work at Lock and Dam 3 at Red Wing. Plans being funded by \$70 million in federal stimulus money, include two major components: an extension of the chamber guide wall and raising and strengthening three earthen embankments which connect the dam with the bluffs on the Wisconsin side.

Project managers have met with the DNR, but say a fish passage is not funded at this time.

Long-time concern

UMWA has been among the organizations concerned about the stability of the earthwork on the Wisconsin side. The Corps expects the work at the lock and dam will create about 500 jobs and most of it will be done during the off-season to avoid interfering with traffic at the busy lock.

River good for birders & birds

Planners like to talk about the Mississippi River system as a “multi-use resource.” Recently the Audubon Society underlined that concept when it named the upper Mississippi as one of the 10 best Midwestern birding trails. The citation coincided with



Above: Bob Gross, Captain of the COE Dredge Fleet, with Mauree Taggatz, wife of the late Harold K. Taggatz and Col. Jon Christensen, St. Paul District Commander aboard the Quarters Boat Taggatz for the boat's christening, May 15. Photo: Sonya Goins, Corps of Engineers

a birding festival held alongside Lake Pepin in early May.

Writing in the society's magazine, Kenn Kaufman said of the upper river, “Incongruous as it might seem, the center of the continent funnels millions of migrating birds, providing vital rest stops for weary shorebirds wading in its wetlands and for woodland species retiring where prairies give way to forests.”

Kaufman says birding along the river is rewarding for watchers because the varieties include small migratory birds and larger birds such as bald eagles, herons and egrets.

The Great River Birding and Nature Festival in Lake City, is an annual event.