

Waterways

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With lock closed, speculation opens

Even before the last kayaker had enjoyed a trip through the 49 foot drop of the Upper St. Anthony Falls (USAF) Lock in Minneapolis last Tuesday, speculation about the lock's future be-

commercial traffic will now travel by truck, dredging above the falls will end and the Corps of Engineers will do a study to determine the lock's future.

"Still, it's unclear exactly what the long-term effects of the lock's closing will have on the river," the report said.

For now, the Corps will have a part-time employee available for tours by appointment and will maintain the structure.

Among the [ideas floated](#) is a suggestion that the gates at Lock and Dam 1 now be opened to return the river between Minneapolis and St. Paul to its natural state and [create a whitewater area for kayakers](#).

However this is the [first time a navigable waterway has been closed to prevent migration of an invasive species](#) and even the short-term effects on surface traffic and other economic and environmental issues aren't understood.

(For an excellent discussion on closing the lock and its costs see Exec. Dir's Col-

umn on page 2)

Even as USAF was closing, more speculative reports were being printed or broadcast about the potential spread of the Asian Carp. For example, on the same day as the USAF closure, [a Michigan television station](#) broadcast a report which stated, "Last week the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources said it captured five bighead carp in the St. Croix River, just miles south of Lake Superior."

Not 'just miles' away

Despite that alarming headline, it turns out that [the five adult fish](#) were caught near the Xcel Energy Allen S. King power plant in Bayport, Minn., which is more than 'just miles' from Lake Superior. The Wisconsin DNR didn't issue a statement on the catch of the adult fish and is asking people who may catch one to turn it in to them.

A more measured media report notes that no carp

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Above: The big drop at USAF was visible when the lock was dewatered 10 years ago for work.

gan. That's because [as one local media outlet put it](#), "Few things are certain about the future of the Upper St. Anthony Lock and Dam after it closes this week."

What is known

MPR says that it is for sure that the lock has been closed to navigation, that it will be maintained, that



From the Executive Director...

(Disclaimer: the thoughts and opinions expressed in this column are those of its author and not necessarily those of the Upper Mississippi Waterway Association or its members.)

Closure of Upper St. Anthony Falls

As this article goes to press, the lock at Upper St. Anthony Falls (USAF) on the Upper Mississippi River is in the process of closing after more than a half-century of making possible the movement of freight and recreational craft of every shape and configuration through the 49-foot drop in the upper river. Historic accounts tell us that as part of the then-battle by Minneapolis interests to establish itself above rival St. Paul in economic importance and social esteem, the lock opened in the fall of 1963 to a load of cast-iron pipe and joyous celebration.

Accounts also remind us that, ironically, after all the pomp and ceremony claiming that with this opening, Minneapolis has trumped St. Paul as the coveted head of navigation on the 'Mighty Mississipp', lack of terminal docks in Minneapolis caused the towboat and its cargo to turn around and go back downriver to unload at St. Paul. Buoyed by the success of downstream locks built since 1907, supporters expected Minneapolis to expand its share of downstream markets. What they couldn't realize at the time was that their city had come too late to the dance in that its lumber and flour traffic, according to a Mn NPR piece, was already sagging. The folly giving Minneapolis bragging rights for being at the head-of-navigation in 1963 would be undone five decades later, returning the silver cup to St. Paul.

Similar but different

With the passage of time, some would now argue that the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul are no longer at loggerheads, but that each has and is, reshaping itself to take advantage of changes in circumstances that inevitably forces itself on all great cities. St. Paul's focus on East Metro partnerships, jobs creation, multi-modal river terminals, green-space, and supporting infrastructure; and Minneapolis' geographic status as gateway to upstate fisheries and a million-dollar recreational and tourism industry, conversion of its riverside to small business, green-space and residential development, makes them

similar to their Twin in many respects, but still opposite sides of the same coin.

While the above descriptions are observational, and not all-inclusive, the one major difference between the two cities seems to be that St. Paul welcomes commerce, industry, tourism, agriculture and commercial navigation in recognition of their collective value to the City and State, whereas Minneapolis does not. Do these observations prove that one city is superior to the other, or that one is more and the other less in moral purpose? Of course not. It only suggests that each is different but that both are successful at developing those differences. Given history, however, today's successes may again prove to be tomorrow's folly.

Lock is closed – who inherits the fallout

Since starting the discussion to close USAF about a decade ago, there have been differences of opinion as to its consequences including the most obvious: how many trucks would be needed to replace barge shipments. Estimates ranged from 4,894 additional trips per year more than 10 times that amount. A May 8, 2015 television report (*Twin Cities-based KARE-11 TV*) indicated that closure of USAF will result in anywhere from 40,000 to 70,000 more trucks, per year, on Interstate 94 between Minneapolis and St. Paul than would otherwise be. "No matter the number, people will be surprised at the amount of truck increase and gridlock after closure", said one veteran navigation expert.

As to expected traffic increases, the St. Paul Port Authority offered that it is currently doing a traffic count for the Childs Road corridor – one of several major access roads to St. Paul river terminals – prior to lock closure and after, in order to obtain base information. Nonetheless, the greater question is why St. Paul should bear the burden of additional wear and tear on already congested roadways simply because it's northern Twin is in pursuit of economic revitalization as the force du jour to increase its vitality, or to save upriver waters from carp invasion, take your pick.

Relocate shippers away from river

To alleviate grid-lock – either political or traffic – some members of the Minnesota legislature reportedly are receptive to providing compensation for the movement of the two

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remaining shippers away from the river. It's been suggested that the aggregate company could not move given the amount of cement it provides to Minneapolis and upstate construction. The other, a metal recycling company, indicated that if it did relocate a part of its operation away from the river, future truck traffic at Minneapolis would likely decrease significantly, but it has no interest in doing so at the present time.

Why was USAF closed?

Good question. To borrow a spiritual paraphrase, that answer is known only unto Congress.

During events leading up to final legislation, reasons for closure included (1) halting the advance of Asian carp into prized upstate fisheries, and (2) a minimum annual tonnage for the preceding 5 years of at least 1.5 million tons. However, neither of these reasons survived to become part of the final legislation.

As passed into law, the legislation has two provisos: (1) the lock shall closed no later than 1 year after enactment of legislation: June 10, 2015; and (2) the Secretary [of the Army] is still required to carry out emergency lock operations necessary to mitigate flood damage.

That's it! Nothing is said about invasive species, minimum tonnage or any other possible happening.

Interestingly though, there is language in a Congressional report to the effect that the once-considered minimum tonnage language is not to be treated as a precedent to other locks which might not achieve 1.5 million tons annually, of which nationwide there are more than "several".

Cost of closure

The COE provided the following information:

*Initial closure cost: \$130,000. The lock was ordered to close, it has not been decommissioned

*Annual cost after closure: \$160,000
 *Visitor center/tours
 *Open by appointment
 *Temporary Corps tour guide
 *Pursuing cooperative agreement with National Park Service
 *Public rest rooms will be open when tour guide is on duty.

Further, the Corps emphasizes that because the lock's hydraulic systems must be operated to keep them functional, lock gates will be opened occasionally during mandatory closure to maintain those systems. This must not be misunderstood as lock reopening. Lock will not be reopened unless ordered by Congress.

And, to our eagle-eyed readers who may look up the exact language covering closure, while the legislation formally orders the closure of both the Lock and Dam, no official word has yet been received on how to go about closing a dam.

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Other items of interest:

- OregonLive reports a, "[Blue Collar hiring boom](#)" in the Portland area, thanks to Greenbrier Company's barge building success. "At a time when family-wage jobs are tough to find for those without a college education, projects like the Kirby barge are worth celebrating."
- The Exploration Vessel (E/V) Nautilus recently went through the expanding Panama Canal and sent back some stunning [underwater images of the canal in operation](#). The first expanded section of the Canal is now open and the Nautilus video is available online.
- The *Winona Daily News* continues its excellent feature series on [Mississippi River history](#), with a look at what a wonder the river steamboat was for its time. The article says it was the equivalent of a 747 for the people along the river at that time.
- The National Grain and Feed Association (NGFA) and the Soy Transportation Coalition (STC) will host the second [Ag Transportation Summit](#) August 4-5 at the Westin O'Hare, Chicago, Ill. Among the agenda items is, "Inland Waterways: The status of funding to upgrade locks and dams, and the potential timing of lock rehabilitation projects, as well as the significance of inland waterways to agriculture."

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eggs or young fish have been captured north of the previously known reproduction area at Keokuk, Iowa.

Another Michigan media outlet told its readers that even though the headwaters of the St. Croix River at Lake St. Croix are about 20 miles south of Lake Superior, [it would take a herculean effort for carp to make the journey naturally.](#)

“To reach Lake Superior via the St. Croix River, the fish would need to hurdle a 20-foot hydroelectric dam and make its way through a northern Wisconsin wetlands complex that marks the headwaters of the Brule and St. Croix rivers,” the report says.

And, as [Waterways pointed out in a past issue](#), carp have been found in land locked waters where only humans could have placed them, meaning physical barriers aren’t foolproof.

Fittingly, [the last barge trip through USAF](#) was piloted by Lee Nelson of Upper River Services and covered by the *StarTribune*. The paper pointed out that Nelson’s administrative duties keep him off the river most of the time, but he successfully piloted the Becky Sue and two barges filled with scrap steel into and out of the lock.

It’s worth noting, that those two barges represent 116 truck trips and with the lock closed, all future hauls will move to area highways.

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What we find inexplicable is that as if to give noble cause to the nondescript closure, news media are broadcasting that it was done to save the Mississippi River from invasive species. Is that an attempt to put words into the mouth of Congress to dissuade the public, is it simply the work of individuals eager to take credit for what some voters perceive as a meritorious event, or is it simply the truth?

It is often said that success has many fathers, whereas failure is an orphan. We wonder how many others will step forward to claim parentage to this not so ‘blessed event’.

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