

Waterways

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Steenhoek to address UMWA 89th Annual

This year's speaker at the Upper Mississippi Waterway Association's annual meeting will be familiar to readers of *Waterways* and other industry and agribusiness media. Mike Steenhoek is Executive Director of the [Soy Transportation Coalition](#) (STC) and a frequently quoted expert on the infrastructure which enables American soybean growers to compete effectively in world markets and the need to rebuild and maintain it.

Represents 85%

STC membership represents areas which raise about 85 % of the soybeans grown in the United States and consequently is listened to in Congress and media. When Steenhoek spoke to the U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure this summer, he expressed the frustration of his members and others with slow and inadequate infrastructure investment.

"While the transportation system that serves U.S. agriculture is more advanced

than those found in many other countries, the competitive advantage we enjoy is in danger of eroding. The unfortunate reality is that the United States can increasingly be described as a spending nation, not an investing nation. Other nations are making investments in their infrastructure while we remain quite lackadaisical in investing in ours. This lackadaisical approach is exacting a toll on our roads and bridges, locks and dams, and ports," Steenhoek said.

Was Senate staff

Steenhoek knows the halls of Congress well, having worked for Iowa Senator Charles Grassley, including time as the Senator's director of economic development. He is a member of the U.S. Department of Commerce's Advisory Committee on Supply Chain Competitiveness, the Transportation Research Board's Committee on Inland Water Transportation and the Iowa DOT's Freight Advisory Council.

The 89th UMWA annual meeting will be held Thursday evening, September 17, at the [Southview Country Club](#) in West St. Paul. An announcement and invitation will be sent soon or you can call UMWA at 651-776-3108 for reservations.

Economics of Canal

STC was one of the sponsors of a recent Informa Economics report called "[Panama Canal Expansion: Impact on U.S. Agriculture](#)," and Steenhoek is likely to talk about the nearly completed expansion of the Canal and what it means to Upper Mississippi River shippers.

In its "Specific Actions Required to Ensure U.S. Agriculture and the Soybean Industry Fully Benefit from Expanded Panama Canal," The Informa report called for, "inland waterways advancing education and awareness through advocacy, encouraging support for maintenance and construction of facilities," and

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**Above: Mike Steenhoek
STC Exec. Director**

From the Executive Director...

WOTUS

[DTN/The Progressive Farmer](#) announced in late July that Attorneys general from 28 states suing EPA over the waters of the United States rule, have asked for a nine-month delay in implementation to allow time to complete judicial review. In a letter to EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy and Assistant Secretary of the Army Jo Ellen Darcy, the attorneys general said more time will be needed beyond the targeted effective date of August 28 to allow courts to review the WOTUS rule. Of the five UMR states of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri and Wisconsin, as of this writing, only AGs of Wisconsin and Missouri were signatories to the letter. Among issues in the complaint are field observations relied on by the COE in developing the final rule related to ordinary high water marks used to make Clean Water Act determinations on tributaries.

AGs said that states will also need time and resources to implement the rule.

Given that WOTUS would expand Clean Water provisions on now exempted streams and wetlands, we thought it would be appropriate to discuss a few current and relevant articles which exemplify the multi-dimensional facets of a complex and contentious issue.

Drain tiles not guilty

[Agrinews.com](#) last month reported that a University of Minnesota professor is questioning a Minnesota River study claiming banks in the Minnesota River basin have been eroding, and that [agricultural] tiling is causing increased flows in rivers and streams, which then eats away at the riverbanks.

This cause-effect argument has been accepted by certain environmental groups as the primary reason for sediment buildup in that river and in Lake Pepin, said Professor Satish Gupta, of the U of M's Department of Soil, Water and Climate.

Gupta said analysis in Iowa and at a laboratory in St. Croix, MN claiming that tile drainage is the cause of increased river levels didn't take into account other causes including increased precipitation.

Skeptical, Gupta and his associates did their own study, the findings of which will soon be published in a journal of the American Geophysical Union. "We started analyzing river flow and annual precipitation data, using 1976 as a starting point", Gupta said, because plastic tile wasn't manufactured in the USA until the late 1960s and was not adapted to drain tile use until after 1976.

The Gupta group found that river flows are higher because we're getting an average of 4 inches more precipitation every year. In fact, he stated, Waseca (MN) gets an average of 8 inches more per year now than in the past. "In the area we studied in southern Minnesota and northern Iowa, there's no space to hold the extra water", he said.

The major problem with the St. Croix study technique is that it showed tile drainage effects where there is no tile drainage. "We took their techniques and applied them to northern Minnesota", said Gupta. "We found a 139 percent increase in tile drainage, when there's no tile drainage in the entire area!"

Concluding, Gupta said they studied a total of 29 different watersheds. "In almost all cases, we found an increase in precipitation that's been happening for the last 30-40 years is causing higher flows in rivers, while tile drainage and cropping systems have had a very minimal impact."

Tree buffers claimed to cool streams

Another study, this one in Oregon, is causing a division between private and public foresters over the value of riverside tree-buffered zones.

The Oregon Department of Forestry embarked on a nine-year study to determine if logging activity was responsible for warming their streams. In short, the study found that streams on private timberland got as much as 4 ½ degrees warmer after logging, whereas in state forests, where more streamside trees had been retained, there was no increase in temperature. Oregon officials are being urged by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to require wider buffers along streams to protect fish from stream warming and silt-laden runoff.

"...The major problem with the St. Croix study technique is that it showed tile drainage effects where there is no tile drainage."

But, says the *River Crossings* article (June 2015), folks in the timber industry insist there's no need for wider stream buffers and disputes the science behind the state standards, claiming streams located on private woodlots should not experience a post-logging temperature increase of more than a half a degree.

Undaunted, NMFS officials insist that the scientific case for leaving more trees to keep streams cooler is sound and urges the Governor to establish some kind of public subsidy to cushion the financial blow to family foresters.

USDA voluntary programs

Adding to the twisted matrix of protecting our nation's water resources is a damaging May 2015 report by a senior economist for the USDA's Economic Research Service. In it, Marc Ribaldo, a senior economist

for that agency said that despite billions of dollars invested, voluntary conservation measures are not enough to address large-scale agricultural pollution.

One reason is that non-point source pollution discharges are unevenly shared among farmers, citing a Chesapeake Bay example, where 20 percent of cropland loses up to 7.5 times the weight of nitrogen per acre than the remaining 80 percent. Secondly, farmers typically enroll in conservation programs for their own self-interest, rather than for the societal need for clean water. It's not that they don't care about environment, said Ribaldo; it's just that decisions on land management are more guided by increasing yields and profits. To be effective, USDA programs should introduce compliance mechanisms that require a target level of results in order to be eligible. Ri-

baldo also took a shot at linking financial assistance to the programs stating that such linking limits the ability of farmers to introduce innovative ideas into conservation management.

As authorized under the 2014 farm bill, voluntary conservation quality incentive and stewardship programs would have their budgets cut in the Obama administration's fiscal 2016 proposal.

Congress upset

Earlier this year, the House of Representatives passed a bill that would require the Secretary of the Army and the Administrator of EPA to withdraw the earlier proposed rule and to prepare a regulatory proposal that will specifically identify those waters covered under, and those waters not covered under, the Federal Water Pollution Control Act.

"...As authorized under the 2014 farm bill, voluntary conservation...programs would have their budgets cut..."

Other items of interest:

- UMWA member [Upper River Services was a partner in a recent river cleanup](#) near the Wakota Bridge and South St. Paul, and many employees were there for the dirty work. In all 200 tires and more than 12-thousand pounds of trash were collected in which MNDNR's Paul Nordell called, "Our biggest river cleanup event in 12 years."
- *Waterways* notes that UMWA member [J.F. Brennan Company](#) is one of 12 firms who received Certificates of Merit from the Wisconsin Society of Professional Engineers at its Wisconsin Governor's New Products Awards (GNPA) ceremony earlier this summer. Brennan's award cited its Broadcast Capping System (BCS™), which places subaqueous caps and sand covers over contaminated bottom areas.
- A couple of Asian Carp stories: 1. Canadian investigators say that two grass [carp found in a Toronto pond](#) doesn't indicate an invasion. Fisheries and Oceans Canada is trying to find out how the fish got into the pond and could find no more after an extensive search. And, 2. That [Montana Craigslist](#) ad which claimed that a man dumped buckets of carp fry into local reservoirs was a fraud. The ad said the man had captured several buckets of the small fish as they jumped around his boat.

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perhaps leading projects for the future.

“The future of grain export capabilities of the United States to meet expanding demand opportunities and requirements is an ever increasing concern. With more sustained levels of export volumes, changing export capacity dynamics, and various export prospects being discussed, there is a very real concern that even if the world demands grains and soybeans, and associated products from the U.S., the U.S. may well not be in a position to meet supply with this demand at competitive prices without more discriminating resource prioritization and investment strategies,” the report said.

Among the more inter-

esting findings in the Informa report is a shifting of the, “Western Indifference Line” westward. That line is said to delineate the point at which the Upper Mississippi River System is competitive or lower cost than surface transportation westward. In Minnesota, the line has moved from 70 miles to 111 miles from the river and in Iowa it is now 161 miles.

While the Panama Canal expansion has been grabbing headlines, [Egypt recently opened its Suez Canal expansion](#), which allows two way traffic and deeper vessels. And for some shippers changes the economic equation of commodity movement to and from Asian ports.

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The bill further provides that the Secretary and the Administrator shall, among other requirements, protect the authorities of State, local governments and private property owners over natural and manmade water features. Another of the bill’s requirements includes the continued recognition of Federal deference to State primacy in the development of water law, governance of water rights, and the establishment of the legal system by which States mediate disputes over water use.

The bill, H.R. 1732 – The Regulatory Integrity Protection Act – passed the House in May by a vote of 261 for and 155 against, now awaits Senate action.

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