

Waterways

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Senator says locks and dams in U.S. are 'Ancient'

Illinois Senator Dick Durbin says infrastructure repair and funding will be one of his top priorities in the new U.S. Congress.

It's 'outrageous'

In [a recent interview](#), Durbin said, "it's outrageous that we spend so little of our (gross domestic product) on infrastructure" compared to other nations, with the U.S. clocking in at 2.5 percent, compared to 5 percent or more in Europe and nearer to 10 percent in rapidly growing China."

Durbin said that the power grid, roads need

funding, especially waterway infrastructure: "Our locks and dams, my God, they're ancient."

Senator Durbin may want to take a look at a



[newly released study](#) on options available for repairing locks and dams.

The study was funded by the United Soybean Board's (USB's) Global

Opportunities program in coordination with the Soy Transportation Coalition and looked at funding options including possibly using bonding authority or imposing new user fees.

Maintain locks

Among other recommendations, the study says there should be more emphasis on maintenance rather than new construction.

Study authors point out that the Corps has many studies which show that it is far more cost effective over the long term to perform advance maintenance

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National media takes note of economic contribution of rivers

Even if the organization had a limitless budget for public relations (which it doesn't), UMWA could not have asked for more or better publicity about the vital role that river com-

merce plays in the nation's economy than resulted from stories about the Midwest drought and its effects on the Mississippi River system.

Among the many me-

dia outlets which did stories about a possible river shutdown and its impact was [NBC Nightly News](#). On January 2nd, Reporter Kevin Tibbles told millions

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From the Executive Director...

A Rock is a Hard Place

It appears the New Year will start out on a positive note. On the first Monday of 2013, Bloomberg News reported that emergency work to remove rock pinnacles and deepen the Mississippi River channel near Thebes, Illinois has averted a shut-down of barge traffic on the nation's busiest waterway; at least for January.

Accelerated removal of rocks and dredging, combined with a warming trend and expectant rainfall will maintain at least a 10-foot channel near Thebes this month, according to Major General John Peabody, commander of the Corps' Mississippi Valley division. The General's Low Water Update, however, was silent on work progress beyond January.

Information prepared by the Corps and made available by American Waterways Operators indicates that of the four critical rock removal sites at Thebes, two are more than 80% complete and the total for all sites is one-third complete as of January 6. Using hydro hammers, cranes and blasting skills, a sufficient amount of debris is expected to be removed by the end of the week to facilitate the movement of loaded barges drawing the customary 9 feet of water. UMWA member, Newt Marine is a contractor on this project.

Warming and rain

The Corps' Low Water Update weather outlook indicates a warming trend and the potential for rain next week. Additionally, the removal of rock obstructions will enable an approximately 2-foot deeper channel in the Thebes reach of the river by January 11. Recent rains and water releases from the Corps' Carlyle Lake in Illinois have improved the forecast for the Middle Mississippi River.

While encouraging, future operations through this area are problematic as the Administration has not moved off its position that the Missouri River continue to be operated for the benefit of that river only

and any negative impact on downstream Mississippi River navigation is secondary to Missouri River interests; collateral damage, if you will.

Through it all, the Corps must follow the Missouri River operating manual which mandates seasonal restrictions on water releases from Missouri River reservoirs while, at the same time, following its congressional mandate to maintain a 9-foot navigation channel on the Mississippi River, record drought or no. Seemingly, the Corps is trapped between a rock and a hard place.

Appropriately, the Corps' motto is Essayons, (let me try).

A River Collaborative: an end to Single-Purpose Advocacy

Another potentially positive development for 2013 may be America's Great Watershed Initiative (agwi.org).

As defined on its website, America's Great Watershed Initiative ". . . is a collaboration that seeks solutions for multiple demands placed on the vast and complex Mississippi watershed system by integrating issues, partners and ideas at the full watershed scale . . . seeking mutually beneficial outcomes in contrast to single purpose advocacy."

The Fall 2012 issue of Our Mississippi, a quarterly newsletter of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, reported on a recent St. Louis-based summit that drew some 200 people from the watershed representing federal agencies, NGOs, academia, barge industry, agriculture and more. All came ready to compromise, organizers said, for the best interest of the river.

Speakers at this event included Craig E. Philip, CEO Ingram Barge Company and Major General John Peabody, commander of the Corps' Mississippi Valley division. Mr. Philip suggested that divergent interests including universities, environmental groups, agriculture and recreational fisheries are more interconnected

"Through it all, the Corps must follow the Missouri River operating manual which mandates seasonal restrictions on water"

than many realize, as all represent beneficiaries from waters that flow through the system.

General Peabody was equally direct: “We all come at these issues with different perspectives and . . . priorities.” Unless we cooperate with each other, listen, understand and compromise with each other, we are not going to get the actions necessary to advance our nation’s most vital resource – The Great Watershed.

General Peabody asked attendees to add their personal goals to a “200-year working vision for the river” to help perfect an

evolving visioning campaign.

Such suggestions and comments will be added to the project’s website and will be included in the next issue of Our Mississippi.

Representative members of the AGWI steering committee include Stephen Gambrell, Mississippi River Commission, US-COE; Dan Mecklenborg, Ingram Barge Company; Roger Wolf, Iowa Soybean Association; and Barb Naramore, UMRBA.

The great Rivers Partnership is a global priority program of The Nature Conservancy.

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of NBC viewers, “Everything from oil to cement to chemicals to 60% of U.S. grain exports moves down this river.”

After saying, “And this artery is clogged,” Tibbles gave viewers some statistics that are very familiar to UMWA members: “A typical towboat moves fifteen loaded barges. It would take six locomotives pulling 216 rail cars, or 1,050 tractor-trailers to move the same amount of goods. So it’s clear how vital the river is to the nation’s commerce.”

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“Everything from oil to cement to chemicals to 60% of U.S. grain exports moves down this river...”

Other items of interest:

- Another recent [NBC news story](#) profiled Chad Pegracke, the 29-year-old man who’s been cleaning up the Mississippi since 1997. The story says, “While he’s not close to declaring victory in his war on refuse, he is making a dent.” NBC says Pegracke’s non-profit Living Lands & Waters has developed into an organization with a \$600,000 annual budget and corporate sponsors like Alcoa, Anheuser-Busch, Cargill and numerous barge companies. Several years ago, UMWA member Upper River Services helped Pegracke into a newly refurbished towboat.
- The Army Corps of Engineers is raising eyebrows and some hackles along the Missouri River watershed. The Corps is [issuing permits for industrial and municipal uses of Missouri River water](#), and is considering charging for surplus river water in the future. The Corps is wrapping up its first water surplus agreement with Williston, N.D.’s Western International Co., an organization that provides water management services to the oil and gas industry.
- Interest in small scale hydropower on the Mississippi continues strong. Quincy, Ill., has been [awarded preliminary permits](#) from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for hydropower at Lock and Dam 24 in Clarksville, Mo., and Lock and Dam 25 in Winfield, Mo. The city was competing for the permits with Free Flow Power. The preliminary permit for Lock and Dam 21 is now held by Hydro Green Energy of Westmont.

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and periodic major rehabilitation that to allow present structures to fail and then replace them. But, says the new study, present funding structures make that impossible.

Upfront financing works

The study says that the U.S. pays for its infrastructure much differently than other countries around the world. It uses case studies of the Panama Canal and the Deurganck lock in Belgium to highlight these differences and says that while the U.S. funds through general revenue and taxes on diesel fuel, European countries and others use a toll approach and upfront financing to

help lock in costs and contracts.

Study writers are particularly critical of the McAlpine Locks and Dam Rehabilitation project which has dragged on for 13 years and come up short on funding during most fiscal years. They say, a bonding type of approach would have meant quicker completion and lower costs. Conservative estimates say a fully funded project at the beginning would have allowed completion of the project in 2002 versus 2009. It would also have reduced the time that waterway users had to rely on the older structure, reducing the risk of service interruption.

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Later in the month, reporter Clay Masters on [National Public Radio](#) talked about the river slowdown and the problems that would result from a shutdown. He interviewed Tim Bly, manager of the Cargill elevator in Muscatine, Iowa, who said lower river levels were already having an impact.

“We had to lighten them (barges) up to a nine-foot draft because of the low water levels, which is about three or 4,000 bushels difference on a barge. It's that much less you're getting on each barge.”

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