

Waterways

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Where sometimes is heard an encouraging word

UMWA members who were watching the surface transportation bill were disappointed there was no funding involved, but the recently enacted surface transportation bill, known as MAP-21, did have some verbiage that recognizes the critical role that navigation infrastructure plays in keeping the nation's economy afloat.

Sense of Congress

In its "Sense of Congress" paragraphs, the legislation, recently signed by the President, talked about how underfunded federal channel maintenance programs are and also highlighted the large gap between the amount of money collected in the Harbor Maintenance Tax (HMT) and actually spent for its intended purpose.

Perhaps the bill's writers had read the recently re-

leased U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) report "[A Reliable Waterway System is Important to Agri-](#)



(Above) Among the three major modes: highway, rail and water, the efficiencies and environmental benefits of waterborne traffic come out on top.

[culture.](#)" USDA says that 2012 ag exports are forecast to be \$131 billion, which will mean a \$24.5 billion trade surplus to the U.S. economy because imports are predicted to be \$106.5 billion.

Critical to ag inputs

The report says waterways also move critical

farm inputs such as fertilizer, feed and fuel. Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack says that for every \$1 bil-

lion in farm exports, 8,400 jobs are created or supported in America.

According to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' statistics cited in the report, in calendar year 2011 the total barge traffic (upbound and down-bound) at Mississippi Lock 27, Ohio Lock and Dam 52,

and Arkansas Lock and Dam 1 included: 20.7 million short tons of corn, 9.2 million short tons of oilseeds, 10.3 million short tons of chemical fertilizers, 4.5 million short tons of processed grain and animal feed and 1.6 million short tons of wheat.

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From the Executive Director...

Back to the Start

What would it take to suddenly turn an ordinary day into a remarkable one? For a car buff, it might be the lucky purchase of a '57 Chevy BelAir for under \$30K; for a struggling actor, it might be the nod of a Broadway casting director for an understudy role in "The Lion King"; and for a boat-nut, it might be something as uncomplicated as spending a few hours on the river.

Two days in June

By those standards, this writer had two remarkable days in June.

The first was a June 13 event promoted by Mississippi Makeover Watershed Partners and numerous co-sponsors including CF Industries, Padelford Riverboats, Friends of Pool 2, and a half dozen or so federal and state agencies.

The purpose of the event was advertised as a tour and floating workshop to inform media, residents, river users and others about two current issues: the threat of Asian carp and restoration of Lower Pool 2 of the Mississippi River.

There's a definite drawback to having a workshop on a side-wheeler while traveling a river on a pleasant early-summer morning: the water, shore and scenery are far more attention-grabbing than any statement or PowerPoint presentation can ever hope to be, but then, things are as they are.

As the Anson Northrup set out from CF Industries at about 0830 hours for a half-day tour of Lower Pool 2, all got first-hand visual information about a proposed channel realignment near the Boulanger/Freeborn area (river mile 817-820).

Now a bottleneck

Currently, this area of the river is a bottleneck caused by an increased amount of sediment coming downriver and settling in the tight turn. Corps hydrologists say that over the past decade sediment runoff from the Minnesota River has increased about 40 percent. For a time this caused river traffic in the Boulanger area to be limited

to six-barge tows instead of the customary 12 to 15 barges.

If all stars align, the Corps estimates that the plan's preferred alternative will be selected by the end of summer 2012, with work to begin late summer 2013 with completion expected the summer of FY 2014.

Remarkable day two

The second remarkable date was June 19 on a river tour from Hastings to Red Wing through Lock 3. The occasion was a boat trip through a navigation lock in connection with a 3-day Minnesota tour by the Minnesota Agriculture Ambassador Institute. MAAI participants are between the ages of 16-24 and represent county or statewide commodity groups as a spokesperson or youth leader. The tour was arranged by Minnesota Soybean, Mankato, Mn.

As suggested earlier in this column, a sleek two-deck Casino yacht (Spirit of the Water) isn't the ideal venue for a business meeting anymore than was a period side-wheeler through Lower Pool 2. Despite the 'hardships', however, the Ambassadors, as did their counterparts on the Anson Northrup, soldiered-on. Passengers on the Spirit, however, had the advantage of a pizza and Coke lunch while they listened to three presenters talk about issues ranging from how water-compelled rates facilitate higher farm income to how/why a barge line does what it does, and personal anecdotes of working on the river.

The topmost attraction for the Ambassadors, judging by comments, was the trip through Lock 3. While not as imposing as the 49-foot drop of the lock at Upper St. Anthony Falls, the idea of going into a lock chamber seemed to catch the imagination of curious minds.

At static level, Pool 3 has a published elevation change of 8-feet, between it and Pool 4. Due to the high waters and flooding of only a day or two earlier, the height difference between the two pools could now be measured in inches, not feet!

"Corps hydrologists say that over the past decade sediment runoff from the Minnesota River has increased about 40 percent."

Somewhat disappointing in a way but instructional none the less.

Schafer Farms tour

After returning to Hastings (following a jaunt down to Red Wing), the group disembarked and continued their program, which in addition to the river tour, covered Red Wing Shoe/Tannery, and an afternoon and evening at Schafer Farms (Goodhue). Included in the Schafer Farm program was a discussion of why it is important to engage consumers in discussions about how animals are raised on farms and the potential consequences if you don't; which brings us to the significance of this column's title.

["Back to the Start"](#) is a two-minute YouTube video depicting the life of a farmer as he turns his family farm into an animal factory before seeing the errors of his ways and opting for a more sustainable fu-

ture. According to YouTube, both the film and soundtrack were commissioned to emphasize the importance of developing a sustainable food system.

See for yourself

The person who told me of the video was apparently a little disturbed at the film's content. It wasn't until later in the day that I had an opportunity to see the film myself. As a consumer, not a meat or chicken producer, I wonder how much difference there is between a farm-to-factory scenario, and an animal factory; treatment of animals is no doubt a major, if not the major issue. Also as a consumer, I'm amazed at the size of chicken breasts and other cuts of meat, pork chops, for instance. We recently purchased de-boned breasts that were as huge as I remember entire chickens being when I was a kid. A similar case can be made for the chops. Are critters

on steroids, or is the large size a product of genetic engineering? Is it due to on-farm feeding of additives or are additives added at the mill where formulas are tweaked before the farmer gets them? Or is it something else?

Whatever the case, the film raised interesting issues but doesn't seem to offer any answers. If you haven't yet seen it, do so and form your own conclusions.

A final note

Finally, we'd like to share a quote from a thank-you note received from one of the Ambassadors:

"I enjoyed our boat ride on the Mississippi and getting to go through the lock and learning the history and real impact it has on the ag industry. It is not something you always think about since we don't see it every day, but I will definitely remember now!"

Thank you Michelle for hitting the nail on the head.

"...the film raised interesting issues but doesn't seem to offer any answers. If you haven't seen it, do so and form your own conclusions."

Other items of interest:

- [UMWA](#) now has a new email address: umwa@umwa.net. Correspondence sent to the old address will be received through the end of July.
- UMWA would like to thank [CF Industries, Inc.](#), Rosemount, Minn., for hosting the June 21, 2012, meeting of the Executive Committee. Scott Dohmen, manager at the Pine Bend Warehouse, gave us a meeting space, lunch and a tour. UMWA continues to be a strong, relevant organization on the river because of active, engaged members like CF Industries.
- The Corps says [St. Anthony Falls Locks and Dam](#) at One Portland Ave., will be open for visitors from 5 to 8 p.m., July 21, in conjunction with the [Minneapolis Aquatennial](#). Lock and Dam 1, next to the Ford Bridge will have an open house that same day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., in conjunction with Highland Fest 2012. There will also be an open house at Lock and Dam 6, in Trempealeu, Wis., July 14, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., in conjunction with [Trempealeu Catfish Days](#).

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And more and more people seem to be getting the message. For example, the Memphis, Tenn., *Commercial Appeal* recently editorialized that, "Congress, despite its concern over additional spending in a sluggish economy, needs to act now and ensure that the locks and dams essential to efficient barge traffic are modernized. Really, it's a cheap fix."

WAVE4

The editorial writer went on to strongly support a bill known as WAVE4 that is being reviewed by committees in both the House and Senate. The legislation

would appropriate an estimated \$220 to \$380 million each year to at least start to update and improve locks and dams on inland waterways. The paper says the law has bipartisan support and would establish priorities and timelines for completion of lock and dam improvements.

"This is important because past practices have led to some hellacious cost overruns and missed deadlines."

Another bill

And, although it's still in committee in a year in which inaction seems the order of the day in Congress, Rep. Cedric Richmond (D-LA), has intro-

duced The DREDGE Act of 2012-Dredging for Restoration and Economic Development of Global Exports. The bill is still in committee and in an election year may have little chance.

Richmond says the legislation would direct the Army Corps of Engineers to dredge the Mississippi River in the area of the Port of New Orleans to 50 feet to accommodate the much larger vessels that will be transiting the Panama Canal in a little over two years.

There's also money for rebuilding wetlands using dredged materials.

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