

Waterways

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On the upper river...

Season opens, funding uncertain

Although the opening of the shipping season on the Upper Mississippi was only about a week later than the 20-year average, a second flood crest is temporarily slowing or, in some areas, halting navigation. The St. Paul District of the Corps of Engineers says the season was inaugurated by the Ingram Marine Group's John M. Rivers when it passed through Lock and Dam 2 at Hastings, Minn. on Thursday, March 31. The up-bound vessel was pushing six loaded barges

The second crest caused the Corps to close all three Twin Cities locks around April 6, and to close Lock and Dam 4 to river traffic a few days later due to a, "debris buildup upstream" and predicted high water flows on the river. Further downriver the Corps imposed helper boat requirements at some facilities because of outflow issues.

Challenges remain

However as UMWA members know, the high water problems will abate and continued strong demand for export commodities is continuing. At the same time, there are serious, on-going concerns about adequate funding for dredging on the river.

For example, in its March 17, *Grain Transportation Report*, the U.S. Department of Agriculture noted that the Corps is, "Implementing a dredging schedule to keep the authorized depth at the mouth of the Mississippi River at 45 feet." But, USDA says, "For most of the year, high water conditions have carried large quantities of silt that accumulates at the mouth of the Mississippi River. The silt deposits are dredged to



(Above) The Upper St. Anthony Falls lock, seen here during dewatering several years ago, is closed because of spring flows.

return the river to normal operating depths. When water depths are reduced, some grain vessels cannot be loaded at the vessel's maximum cargo capacity, causing economic inefficiencies for U.S. grain exporters in the global market." And USDA notes, "There is debate on whether there will be sufficient funding for more dredging later in 2011."

The Continuing Resolution, which passed the U.S. House and Senate this week, funds the Army Corps of Engineers at the President's request level of \$4.9 billion for the fiscal year ending in September.

Season to 3

From the Executive Director . . .

Asian Carp: Red Herring

The battle to close navigation locks to hold back the movement of Asian carp, which for over a year has been largely confined to the Illinois Waterway and locks separating the Chicago area waterways from the Great Lakes, has been bumped up a notch in Minneapolis. At a March 31, meeting, the City Council moved unanimously to support Minnesota in its efforts to block the spread of Asian carp into the Upper Mississippi River.

Specifically, the City urges the U.S. Congress to fund appropriate federal agencies and solicits the Minnesota Governor to direct the state DNR to protect the upper Mississippi River at Minneapolis from this invasive fish. The City also supports a monitoring and detection program to determine the extent of breeding populations within the Mississippi, St. Croix and Minnesota rivers.

According to MPRnews, Dr. John Anfinson, chief of resource management for the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA), told council members “the Twin Cities are in a way, a gatekeeper to the heart of Minnesota”. A wide path through central Minnesota could be affected if the carp get past the Twin Cities, he said. Continuing, Dr. Anfinson, said his agency will seek congressional authorization for emergency closure of L&D 1 and both St. Anthony Falls locks once it has been determined that invading carp have reach a yet-to-be defined ‘trigger point’. Whether the ensuing closure would be temporary or permanent will most likely be addressed in the request for authorization.

Coon Rapids Dam a natural defense

It came to our attention earlier that MNRRA commissioned a study to determine if the Coon Rapids Dam located some 14 miles upstream of the three Minneapolis locks could be used as a carp barrier. In January the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* reported that a \$16 million upgrade would make that dam 99 to 100 percent effective at stopping the carp’s upriver movement. If approved and funded this year the improvements could be done by 2013, said Martin Weber, principal water resources engineer for Stanley Consultants, the engineering firm that conducted the

study. We learned, however, that the dam’s owner, Three Rivers Park District, does not support the upgrade project, suggesting instead, that money would be better spent stopping the carp further downstream where they might be ‘controlled’.

The Coon Rapids project has support nevertheless. While dams at St. Anthony Falls, the Ford Dam and the Hastings Dam are taller and therefore better block the fish, they all have locks that allow fish to move upstream with boats, said Luke Skinner, DNR supervisor of the state’s invasive species program. “The Coon Rapids dam is the first dam on the river that does not have a lock” he said.

Motives called into question

Why then, ask some, is MNRRA pushing to close L&D 1 at the downstream end of the Minneapolis harbor, where closure will terminate barge shipments, severely limit recreational boating and increase air pollution and traffic gridlock as over a half-million tons of barge freight seasonally will be forced to move by truck?

A close-to-home answer is that a carp-induced closure at L&D 1 will insure successful completion of the City’s three decade program to purge the Upper Harbor of all river-dependent industries, relegating the federally authorized and funded commercial navigation locks at St. Anthony to recreational use only.

The big picture answer, however, is probably that Coon Rapids is only a hop, skip and a jump from the state’s premier recreational fishing area and a back-door route to Lake Superior and the other Great Lakes. A breach of that lock is, by federal objectives, a great risk, given that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has charged its Asian Carp Working Group with developing a plan which first and foremost protects the Nation’s natural resources.

From another perspective, the overall size and scope of federal efforts may be too distant with no nearby or definitive management plans, suggesting a need for state-level risk assessments. This is likely the reason MNRRA has taken up the cudgel to defend the 72-mile Mississippi corridor under its authority.

Where is the feared foursome

Adding to the complexity of the issue is that no one knows with certainty where the carp are or, as

Executive Dir. to 3

Executive Dir. from 2

importantly, where they are not.

MNRRRA states, that of the four species in question: Black, Grass, Silver and Bighead carp, no breeding populations have been found in the Mississippi River above the Iowa border. However, individual carp have been found in Lake Pepin, and a Bighead was found in Lake St. Croix in the late 1990s.

According to the National Asian Carps Plan (2007) Silver carp, the dreaded 110 pound, 10-foot jumpers with a history of injuring boaters, along with the Bighead and Black carp are all members of 'injurious wildlife', with high risk potential. The risk of the relatively benign Grass carp remains an open question. Confusing the situation is the fact that according to USFWS, Bighead and Grass carp are sold [and shipped live] as food fish; Grass carp are also used for aquatic weed control; and Black carp are used for biological control of aquatic parasites.

Industry hears conflicting messages

Although we see federal and state efforts as problematic, our suspicions are tempered somewhat by a statement made by MNRRRA Superintendent Paul Labovitz at our March meeting that the National Park Service is not out to close any locks, "but wants to explore all available options to stem the advance of other exotic species that will be coming up the Mississippi River."

What industry hears from USFWL, however, is that while not the stated intent, locks will be closed if there is an imminent threat to the 'Nation's natural resources'. This is exactly the case being made in Chicago and is further reinforced by the fact that the carp czar appointed by President Obama is limited to finding ways to separate the Mississippi River watershed from the Great Lakes and by a bill recently introduced into both houses of Congress that would make law, the physical disconnect between those two bodies.

In summary, it seems the interests of the prime fishing lakes in up-state Minnesota along with the Great Lakes commercial and game fishing industry are pitted against regional and national economic needs as represented by commercial use of the Mississippi River and other federally authorized waterways.

While not conceding the outcome, should it come to

Executive Dir. to 4

Season from 1

But the Obama Administration's proposed Fiscal Year 2012 budget says the Corps should get about \$913 million less for its Civil Works Program and a steep reduction in its construction account.

Elsewhere in Congress efforts continue to put together a 2011 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). In February Senators Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and James Inhofe (R-OK), sent a letter to colleagues asking that they submit requests for projects to be included in the new WRDA.

At a March 31, hearing in the Senate Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Sen. Inhofe indicated his support for a new water resources bill and talked about the importance of investing in water resources infrastructure. He said he was disappointed in the proposed reductions in the President's proposed budget.

"As a fiscal conservative, I strongly support the overall goal of cutting government spending," Inhofe said. "But I firmly believe that two areas worthy of spending taxpayer dollars are defense and infrastructure..."

"We have significant water resources needs across the country, but we aren't dedicating the funds necessary to address them."

Inhofe went on to note that, "Only approximately half of the annual revenue in the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund is spent as intended – on critical maintenance dredging – while the rest is counted as offsetting the deficit."

Supports Capital Plan

At the recent Waterways Seminar in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the Waterways Council, Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar let those attending know that she supports the Inland Waterways Capital Development Plan put together after 18 months of hard work by an industry coalition and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"I think our economy depends on a robust water transportation system and our economy depends on businesses like yours," Klobuchar said.

The Senator also serenaded Seminar attendees with a bit of a Girl Scout song she learned while a member of that organization.

The song is titled, "Barges" and you can find a very

Season to 4

Season from 3

nice version of the song on the web site *YouTube* by typing “Barges’ Scout Campfire Song” in the search box. You’ll also find the lyrics in the lower right corner of this page.*

Other river related items:

- *Waterways* notes that CSX railroad uses its radio spots to tell listeners that rail shipment is the most environmentally friendly way to move freight “on land.” As UMWA members know, the MOST environmentally friendly way to move bulk commodities is by water.
- American Commercial Lines (ACL) is recalling about 200 hourly employees at its Jeffboat manufacturing facility and will be hiring salaried people in the next few weeks because of an increase in orders for new barges.
- The navigation season on the Missouri River began March 22, ahead of the official opening date of April 1. Missouri’s Department of Transportation expects “the biggest shipping season in a decade” on the navigable stretches of the Missouri.
- Also on the Missouri, the Corps of Engineers has announced that it has cancelled the first of two scheduled pulses to benefit the endangered pallid sturgeon. Snow melt has raised levels eliminating the need for the two-day pulse.
- Democrat New York Senator Charles Schumer is pushing for more dredging funds he says are needed to keep the Genesee River open to Rochester, N.Y. Local businesses in the area estimate that if barges are unable to get to the city, there could be 7,000 more trucks per-year on area roads.

Executive Dir. from 3

pass that the demands of natural resources supersede the needs of transport infrastructure and economic vitality, those river-dependent industries so sacrificed must be compensated for their loss.

Those impacted include not only industries located in the Minneapolis upper harbor, but their customers who will be forced to pay more for transportation, taxpayers, packet boat operators, recreational boaters and MNRRRA’s own Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures program.

Several other thoughts: What level of government will decide when the trigger point to close the lock has been reached? Who will decide when, and if the closed lock will be reopened? Will economic and public interest groups be involved in these decisions – or will this be limited to federal agencies?

Finally, if water transport is eliminated, has anyone determined how the state will find ways to pay for increased highway maintenance, added roadway wear and tear, increased airborne pollutants and increased traffic gridlock as more than 20,000 truckload trips per season will be required to move that which once moved by barge?

Yes, in some cases federal, state and local governments must take the lead to protect natural resources; however that can best be achieved if they remember to also recognize their obligation to facilitate employment opportunities, vibrant economies and social stability.

***Barges**

Out of my window, looking in the night
I can see the barges' flickering light
Silently flows the river to the sea
And the Barges too float silently

Chorus

Barges I would like to go with you
I would like to sail the ocean blue
Barges have you treasures in your hold?
Do you fight with pirates brave and bold?