SUMMARY REPORT OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER COMMISSION 2003 HIGH-WATER INSPECTION TRIP

The following is an executive summary prepared for the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works and the Chief of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on the 2003 High-Water Inspection Trip of the Mississippi River Commission. The 365th Session of the Commission was held on board the Motor Vessel MISSISSIPPI from Cape Girardeau, Missouri to New Orleans, Louisiana, during the period 7-11 April 2003.

Summary

Interest and support for the comprehensive watershed plans and studies and the role of the Mississippi River Commission in developing and operating projects on the Mississippi River and its tributaries remain high. The semiannual inspection trips and public meetings held by the Commission continue to be an effective means of partnering with local sponsors, informing the public, and receiving suggestions and requests of local sponsors and the public.

The MRC will provide reports of its proceedings and actions regarding the Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway System Navigation Feasibility Study; Upper Mississippi River Comprehensive Feasibility Study; the Louisiana Coastal Study; and other comprehensive watershed plans and studies.

Major MRC Efforts and Concerns

- Within the valley there are three large, comprehensive studies underway that are different than traditional feasibility studies and are on fast track to completion:

  1) Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway Systems Navigation Feasibility Study

  2) Upper Mississippi River Comprehensive Study (Flood Control)

  3) The Louisiana Coastal Area (LCA) Comprehensive Plan

  These will require a synchronized effort of the Project Development Team to include District, Division, USACE Headquarters, and the Office of the ASA(CW).

- The development of an LCA Comprehensive Plan that will serve as a blueprint for restoration of the Louisiana coastal marshes is of vital importance to the Mississippi Valley and the Nation and is strongly endorsed by the MRC.

- The MRC supports the need for additional General Investigation funds for timely completion of the Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway Systems Navigation Feasibility Study, Upper Mississippi River Comprehensive Study, and LCA Comprehensive Plan.

- The selected plan for the St. Johns/New Madrid Project presents a well-balanced and sustainable plan. The residents within the project area are fully supportive. The MRC conducted site visits and heard strong support by the public for the project and heard no opposition. The public expressed concerns about delays from potential litigation and Missouri's denial of the water quality certificate.

- The MRC is concerned about the continued inadequate funding of the MR&T Project. The current request by sponsors is $435m for FY04.

- The MRC is pleased that the reevaluation of the Yazoo Backwater Pump project recommended a well-balanced plan for a sustainable future for local interests in the lower Yazoo Delta. During the public meeting there was very strong support for the project by local residents of the project-impacted area and there was no opposition.

- If funds are appropriated, the MRC intends to review and provide a recommendation regarding the Lower Mississippi River Resource Needs Assessment. Strong support for this assessment was heard from the Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee, an organization of State resource agencies.

General Themes Resulting from the Public Meetings

- Several speakers disagreed with the Administration's proposal on the use of Inland Waterways Fund for O&M of Civil Works projects.

- Several speakers requested an increase in O&M funding at Flood Control Lakes. Many of the roads and structures have exceeded design life.

- Many speakers strongly disagreed with proposals to remove Civil Works from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

- Several speakers supported keeping navigation open on the Missouri River and leaving the MO River Master Manual unchanged.

- Support was heard for the Lower Mississippi River Resource Needs Assessment.

- Beneficial Use of Dredge Material: Levee Boards request continued consideration for making dredged material available for future flood fighting by placing this material on the backside of existing levees where feasible.

- Small Harbor/Port Maintenance: Speakers expressed strong opposition to the Administration's position of not funding maintenance dredging for small harbors. These harbors provide valuable regional economic impacts and most of the tonnage (cumulative) on the larger waterways.

- Recreation Support: Strong support for adequately funding recreation activities at MVD Lakes which provide very strong regional economic benefits and directly interface/serve our customers.

- Various speakers voiced strong support for the Louisiana Coastal Area Comprehensive Plan.

- Levee Board Support: Strong support from Levee Boards for the outstanding service they get from the Corps Districts.

NOTE: Attached to this report is a copy of the public meeting statistics.