

Dear Mr. Bertels:

Thank you for your remarks before the Mississippi River Commission during the public meeting in Alton, Illinois, on August 15, 2002. In your statement you discussed the Upper Mississippi Navigation Study and the issues surrounding the Master Manual on the Missouri River.

The Commission recognizes the position of your organization in supporting lock modernization. The Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterways (UMR-IWW) System Navigation Study has been restructured to give equal consideration of fish and wildlife resources and navigation improvement planning consistent with recommendations from the National Research Council and the Federal Principals Group. The restructured study will ensure the UMR-IWW system continues to be a nationally significant ecosystem and a nationally significant commercial navigation system as designated by Congress. The restructured study will address the navigation efficiency needs of the UMR-IWW, the ongoing cumulative effects of navigation, and the ecosystem restoration needs with a goal of attaining an environmentally sustainable navigation system. The full economic and environmental evaluations necessary to support a potential recommendation for construction of navigation improvements and implementation of ecosystem restoration measures will be completed by October 2003. These potential plans will be presented at a series of public meetings beginning in October 2003 to gain public input prior to making a final recommendation. The final feasibility report is currently scheduled for completion in 2004. For more information and details concerning the UMR-IWW System Navigation Study, please refer to the Rock Island District website: <http://www2.mvr.usace.army.mil/umr-iwwsns/>.

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In regard to your comments concerning the Missouri River Master Water Control Manual Review and Update, a recommendation for a Preferred Alternative (PA) water control plan was made to the Headquarters of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works in May of this year. At that time, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and the Council on Environmental Quality were also informed of the PA. The Corps and the Service agreed to enter into informal consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act and are currently engaged in that process.

During the informal consultation, the Corps and the Service are working cooperatively to assess available scientific and technical information and explore a range of possibilities regarding operation of the Missouri River Mainstem Reservoir System. The two agencies believe the public will be much better served by a product that reflects the coordinated position of the entire Executive Branch. The Corps of Engineers will use the results of the consultative process as we complete the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Master Manual Review and Update. The FEIS will include a description of the environmental and economic impacts of the PA including an analysis of impacts to some Mississippi River uses/resources. A 30-day comment period will follow release of the FEIS to provide the public an opportunity for review and comment. Following the comment period, the Corps will prepare a Record of Decision, revise the existing Master Manual to reflect the selected water control plan, and implement that plan.

Balancing the flood control, navigation, and environmental needs within the Mississippi Valley remains a challenge. Your continued input is invaluable to the Corps' ability to meet this challenge. The Commission appreciates receiving your views and will be pleased to hear from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Don T. Riley  
Brigadier General, U.S. Army  
President Designee, Mississippi  
River Commission