

Dear Mr. Guenther:

Thank you for your remarks before the Mississippi River Commission during our public meeting held on August 17, 2001, in St. Louis, Missouri. In your statement you discussed several issues including the Upper Mississippi Navigation Study and the issues surrounding the Master Manual on the Missouri River. You also noted the importance of agriculture to our economy and its relationship to the navigation system.

On August 2, 2001, the Director of Civil Works, on behalf of the Chief of Engineers and the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, instructed the Corps of Engineers to resume the Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway System Navigation Study. The refocused study will develop a plan to be used as a framework for the environmental sustainability of the river's navigation system, ecosystem, and floodplain management, while preserving the operational characteristics of each. A collaborative process is underway with all stakeholders of the Upper Mississippi River to prepare an interim report on a comprehensive management plan by July 2002 with a final report due later.

The National Federal Senior Principals Task Force was established by the Corps of Engineers to provide national-level balance and guidance on important economic and environmental issues to assist in bringing this study to completion and to advise the Corps on appropriate study adjustments to address the National Research Council recommendations. The Principals Group includes senior Washington administrators of the Maritime

Administration, the Agricultural Marketing Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Corps of Engineers. The Corps intends to continue to involve this group throughout the life of this study. A regional version of the group also provides Federal interagency input for the study. As Commander of the Corps' Mississippi Valley Division, I am chairman of this Regional Interagency Work Group.

With regard to the ongoing revision effort for the Missouri River Master Manual, the Corps of Engineers will be meeting with stakeholders in the Missouri and Mississippi River Basins during our continued pursuit of a technical solution. A desired solution avoids jeopardy for endangered species while maintaining current standards of flood protection on the Missouri River and supporting navigation on the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. Your statement and information submitted to the Commission during the public meeting have been forwarded to the Corps of Engineers Northwestern Division for consideration and use. The following paragraphs provide the current status of Corps consideration of modified Missouri River Reservoir operations and opportunities.

On August 31, 2001, the Corps Northwestern Division published its revised draft environmental impact statement (RDEIS) for public and agency review and comment. During the 6-month comment period, extending from August 31, 2001, to February 28, 2002, workshops and hearings will be conducted from Helena, Montana, to New Orleans, Louisiana, to provide information on the RDEIS and solicit input from individuals, tribes, states, other Federal agencies, and interest groups. Corps of Engineers Mississippi Valley Division staff will be available during workshops at the Mississippi River locations. Each meeting will follow the same format with a public informational workshop from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. and a public hearing each evening beginning at 7:00 p.m. Locations along the Mississippi River include:

November 13, 2001 Radisson Hotel and Suites
 2000 North Fourth Street
 St. Louis, Missouri 63102
 (314) 621-8200

November 14, 2001 Radisson Hotel
185 Union Avenue
Memphis, Tennessee 38103
(901) 528-1800

November 15, 2001 Pontchartrain Hotel
2031 St. Charles Avenue
New Orleans, Louisiana 70140
(504) 524-0581

Following language in the Senate version of the Fiscal Year 2002 Appropriations Bill, the RDEIS presents a range of alternative water control plans with and without a spring rise and low summer flows from Gavins Point Dam. The RDEIS does not identify a preferred alternative, which provides an unbiased forum for public comment. It also allows the Corps and the Administration more time to evaluate public comments and the National Academy of Science report prior to making important decisions regarding Missouri River operations. The National Academy of Science report is to be completed this fall.

Specifically, the RDEIS presents the impacts of six alternative flow management plans on a number of important economic uses and environmental resources in the Missouri River Basin. The RDEIS also examines the impacts of these alternatives on Mississippi River navigation economics and shallow water habitat.

After considering all public comments, the results of a study being conducted by the National Academy of Sciences, and other relevant information, the Corps will prepare a final environmental impact statement and a record of decision. These documents will serve as the basis for revising the master water control manual and for developing an annual operating plan. Currently, implementation of the selected plan is scheduled for March 2003.

The Corps will continue its efforts to meet the flood control, navigation, and environmental needs in the Mississippi Valley. Our success is largely attributable to a strong partnership with local interests and associations such as yours.

Thank you again for your participation during the St. Louis hearing. The Commission appreciates receiving your comments and looks forward to hearing from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Edwin J. Arnold, Jr.
Brigadier General, U. S. Army
President Designee, Mississippi
River Commission