

Dear Mr. McCrory:

Thank you for the statement made before the Mississippi River Commission by Mr. Randy Richardson of your staff during the public meeting held in Memphis, Tennessee, on August 20, 2001. Mr. Richardson discussed a 12-foot navigation channel on the Mississippi River, Federal maintenance of the McKellar Lake Auxiliary Harbor, and the Master Water Control Manual changes for the Missouri River.

The Commission acknowledges your request to seek funding for a comprehensive detailed cost-benefit analysis for a reliable 12-foot navigation channel. As you are aware, the Senate Report accompanying the Fiscal Year 2001 Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act included language which urged the Corps to evaluate the current availability of a 12-foot navigation channel and the feasibility of ensuring a dependable 12-foot navigation channel on the lower Mississippi River below Cairo, Illinois. We have completed an engineering analysis of existing conditions and found that between Baton Rouge and Vicksburg, a channel depth of 12 feet is available 89 percent of the time on an annual basis and 66 percent of the time during August, September, and October. From Vicksburg to Memphis a 12-foot channel is available 89 percent of the time annually and 65 percent of the time during the August to October period. From Memphis to Cairo, a 12-foot channel is available 89 percent of the time annually and 67 percent of the time during the August to October period. It is probable that as construction of the Channel Improvement project is completed over the next 19 years, the percentage of time that 12-foot

navigation channel depths are available will continue to increase. For this reason no further studies are planned at this time.

The Commission acknowledges your efforts to obtain authorization for the Corps to perform maintenance dredging at the McKellar Lake Auxiliary Harbor. The Memphis District will continue to work with you in this effort. When authorization is obtained, the District will perform the required dredging in conjunction with its normal harbor maintenance.

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.

Thank you again for the presentation by the Memphis and Shelby County Port. The Commission appreciates receiving your views and will be pleased to hear from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

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