

NEWS RELEASE

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Mississippi Valley Division/Mississippi River Commission

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MRC holds public meeting concerning Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterways Navigation Feasibility Project

VICKSBURG, MISS., November 23, 2004 – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mississippi River Commission (MRC), conducted a public meeting Monday (November 22), concerning the Final Feasibility Report of the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterways System Navigation Feasibility Study and Report. The project is being managed by the Corps' Rock Island and St. Paul districts.

The purpose of the public meeting was for the commission to consider the project report as it pertains to the impacts on the Mississippi River and the Mississippi River and Tributaries project. The Mississippi River Commission, established in 1879, is responsible for navigation, flood control and other water resources development on the Mississippi River.

Commission members present at the public meeting were Brig. Gen. Robert Crear (President-designee of the Mississippi River Commission and Division Commander for the Mississippi Valley Division), Mr. Sam Angel, Mr. R.D. James, Mr. Clifford Smith, and Rear Admiral Samuel P. De Bow, Jr. Brig. Gen. William Grisoli participated via teleconference.

During the one-and-a-half-hour meeting, the commission reviewed the project, concurred in the findings and recommendation of the Rock Island District Engineer, and voted unanimously to recommend implementation of the project. The next step in the process is for the MRC Report to be transmitted to the Corps' Headquarters in Washington, D.C., for inclusion in the Chief of Engineer's Report. The report will be mailed this week. The package will then be forwarded to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works for transmitting to Congress for authorization.

"This project is critical to sustaining and maintaining the economic and environmental livelihood of the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway system," said Brig. Gen. Robert Crear, President-designee of the commission. "Our vertical team at USACE headquarters, MVD, the Rock Island District, as well as the commission staff, has worked to develop and present a plan to the Chief of Engineers that will ensure success for the Mississippi watershed now and into the future."

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The recommended plan includes a program of incremental implementation and comprehensive adaptive management to achieve the dual purposes of ecosystem restoration and navigation improvements.

The details include:

-- An initial 15-year increment of ecosystem restoration actions with continuous analysis and review to shape the next increment.

-- Immediate implementation of non-structural and small-scale structural navigation measures, together with monitoring and reporting of traffic and economic conditions.

-- Pre-construction engineering and design of seven locks, together with further analysis, with initiation of construction subject to congressional review.

The plan, if approved, will be implemented in a phased manner with future checkpoints for the Administration and Congress.

During the meeting, numerous questions were asked by and points made by the commissioners. Seeking a balance, Commissioner R.D. James of New Madrid, Mo., queried the project team regarding the dual authority of the plan and sought assurances that if a pool was reduced on the Upper Mississippi, flood control measures in place below Cairo, Ill., are not compromised.

In addition, Commissioner Clifford Smith from Houma, La., echoed the sentiments of the other commissioners present when he stated, "No action is not an option!"

The Mississippi River Commission has statutory authority to operate on the Mississippi River from its headwaters at Lake Itasca, Minn., to Head of Passes, La. This authority is dependant upon congressional authorization and funding of projects. The projects considered and implemented by the MRC may be part of the existing Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) project or separate projects. The MR&T project, authorized by Congress following the 1927 flood, is the comprehensive flood control and navigation plan for the lower Mississippi valley, below Cape Girardeau, Mo. District offices located in St. Paul, Minn.; Rock Island, Ill.; St. Louis, Mo.; Memphis, Tenn.; Vicksburg, Miss.; and New Orleans, La., conduct the programs and activities overseen by the commission.



At table, from left to right: Mississippi River Commissioners Mr. Clifford Smith, Mr. Sam Angel, Brig. Gen. Robert Crear (president-designee), Mr. R. D. James and Rear Adm. Samuel DeBow listen as the Rock Island District team members provide information on the Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway System Navigation Study.