MISSISSIPPI RIVER COMMISSION
P.O. BOX 80
VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI 39181-0080

Email: cemvd-ex@usace.army.mil
Web site: www.mvd.usace.army.mil/mrc

** nominee
* designee

MISSISSIPPI RIVER COMMISSION

VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI

August 24, 2012

Statement of the Mississippi River Commission
Extreme Low-Water Condition

Exceptional drought conditions persist across much of the Mississippi drainage basin. River stages threaten historic low-water marks just one year after the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) project passed the largest flood in the recorded history of the river. On the river gauges at Memphis, Vicksburg, and Natchez, river fluctuations exceed 55 feet between the 2011 highs and the 2012 lows to date. Such wide variations in stages over successive years have never before been witnessed (enclosure). Those same fluctuations highlight the daunting challenges confronting river engineers as they attempt to protect surrounding lands from devastating floods while balancing the water-borne commercial needs of the nation.

The severe low-water conditions coincide with the height of the harvest season. A safe and reliable marine interstate system on the Mississippi River is an absolute necessity at this critical time when the nation is trying to move its bountiful agricultural product for export. Since June, when weather forecasts indicated low-river stages, the Corps of Engineers has intensively managed dredging assets, executed emergency dredging contracts, and closely coordinated with the U.S. Coast Guard, the river navigation industry, port authorities, and local, state, and federal partners to ensure a safe and reliable marine interstate system on the Mississippi River. Even with this intense effort, many small ports and harbors, which function as the exit and on ramps for the marine interstate system, remain closed or restricted because of the low water.

If not for the timely passage of the 2011 emergency supplemental bill on December 23rd, which included funding to remove flood-induced sediment from channels, ports, and harbors, the Corps of Engineers would not be in a position to facilitate waterborne commerce on the Mississippi River without major impacts to other authorized projects around the nation. Without supplemental appropriations, the deep-draft navigation channel below Baton Rouge would have experienced continued restrictions, greatly affecting import and export activity along the nation's busiest shipping corridor. The emergency funding designed to help the nation recover from devastating floods is now also enabling the nation to maintain commerce despite extreme low-water stages.

Since 1879, the seven-member Presidentially appointed Mississippi River Commission has developed and matured plans for the general improvement of the Mississippi River from the Head of Passes to the Headwaters. The Mississippi River Commission brings critical engineering representation to the drainage basin, which impacts 41% of the United States and includes 1.25 million square miles, over 250 tributaries, 31 states, and 2 Canadian provinces.

The United States is a maritime nation. As such, the Mississippi River Commission strives to help maintain the nation's global economic competitiveness by ensuring a reliable navigation channel and the commercial viability of ports and harbors, mitigating flood risks to enable economic activity near our waterways, protecting environmental habitat, and facilitating recreation. An adequate and systematic approach to address dredging needs, particularly at small ports and harbors on a regular basis, remains elusive. This commission will do all in its power to assure that the nation remains focused on a maritime system that provides an efficient, environmentally sustainable method to transport goods to market where they can feed the world, energize our economy, build our infrastructure, and provide essential inputs for economic activity.

John W. Peabody
Major General, U.S. Army
President, Mississippi
River Commission
Vicksburg, MS

Hon. Sam E. Angel
Senior Civilian Member
Lake Village, AR

Hon. R. D. James
Civilian Member, Engineer
New Madrid, MO

Hon. Wm. Clifford Smith
Civilian Member, Engineer
Houma, LA

Margaret W. Burcham
Brigadier General, U.S. Army
Member Designee
Great Lakes & Ohio River Division
Cincinnati, OH

Gerd F. Glang
Rear Admiral
Member Designee
National Oceanic &
Atmospheric Administration
Silver Spring, MD

Anthony C. Funkhouser
Colonel, U.S. Army
Member Designee
Northwestern Division
Portland, OR

MISSISSIPPI RIVER COMMISSION
ESTABLISHED JUNE 1879

Low-Water Inspection Trip Report

Mississippi River	Difference in River Elevation between 2011 & 2012
Cape Girardeau, MO	**39 feet**
Cairo, IL	**53 feet**
New Madrid, MO	**48 feet**
Memphis, TN	**59 feet**
Vicksburg, MS	**57 feet**
Red River Landing, LA	**50 feet**
New Orleans, LA	**16 feet**