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Contact:

David Hewitt 202-761-4826
david.w.hewitt@usace.army.mil

World Wide Web:

www.usace.army.mil

News Release:

www.hq.usace.army.mil/cepa/newsrel.htm

Ron Fournier

309-794-5274

ronald.f.fournier@usace.army.mil

Proposal to Restore Ecosystem and Improve Navigation Released for Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway

WASHINGTON, DC. – The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers released for public review and comment today a draft proposal outlining its preferred plan for future ecosystem restoration and navigation efficiency improvements to the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers.

The preferred integrated plan presented in the draft Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway System Navigation Feasibility Study and Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement report establishes a framework for modifications and operational changes to insure environmental sustainability and navigation efficiencies. This framework provides an adaptive and integrated approach to future management of the navigation system and ecosystem.

The preferred plan will include a \$5.3 billion first cost long-term framework for ecosystem restoration, and a \$2.4 billion first cost long-term framework for navigation efficiency improvements. The plan, if approved, will be implemented in a phased manner with future checkpoints for the Administration and the Congress. Details of the preferred integrated plan 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 new locks, together with further analysis, with initiation of construction subject to congressional review.

The Corps Study has greatly benefited from early involvement of a “Federal Principals Group” that was formed to serve as a “sounding board” for the Corps study team. The Federal Principals Group, consisting of senior managers from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Transportation, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, worked collaboratively to review the Study’s progress and to discuss issues.

“The Upper Mississippi and Illinois rivers are extremely complex navigation and ecological systems. Any proposed changes require collaboration at the highest level of government,” Brigadier General Don T. Riley, commander of the Corps’ Mississippi Valley Division. “The Federal Principals Group has brought insights to the study process that are reflected in our draft proposal.”

"This preferred plan is a result of several years of engagement by the Federal partners representing their customers' and stakeholders' concerns and interests, as well as national interests," said Barbara Robinson, deputy administrator, Transportation and Marketing Programs, U.S. Department of Agriculture. "The Principals believe this process of developing the preferred plan was a productive process, engaging a diverse set of viewpoints and allowing a full discussion of those viewpoints. In this way, the plan proposed by the Corps for public review and comment benefits from the varied input provided by the five agencies' perspectives on difficult issues."

The preferred plan, according to Brig. Gen. Riley, seeks to restore the riverine ecosystem and improve the navigation system. Its goal is to ensure the waterway system continues to be a nationally treasured ecological resource as well as an efficient national transportation system by seeking ways to:

- Provide an efficient national navigation system,
- Achieve an environmentally and economically sustainable system,
- Address ecosystem and floodplain management needs related to navigation,
- Operate and maintain the system to ensure economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

Brig. Gen. Riley added that the preferred plan reflects the need for adaptive management of both the ecosystem restoration and navigation components as suggested by many of the stakeholders. The additional review and reporting requirements will allow the Corps to offer the most current information and the greatest flexibility to Congress and the Administration to properly budget, fund, and respond, including delaying or halting project components.

"This will help ensure that our recommendations are based on the best available evaluation tools that become available over time," Brig. Gen. Riley said. "Considering the ever-aging river navigation system, the elaborate ecosystems, and the continued stress placed on these significant American rivers, we believe our preferred plan will ensure these rivers remain a national treasure for generations to come."

Public meetings in June precede the final report slated for later this year. A Chief of Engineers Report containing final recommendations will be prepared this fall for review by the Administration and submission to Congress. All public comments will be reflected in the final report.

The draft Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway System Navigation Feasibility Study and Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement report is available at <http://www2.mvr.usace.army.mil/umr-iwwsns/>