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of Engineers**
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News Release

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Locks 27 Traffic Jam Is Declared Over

Granite City, Ill. – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in St. Louis says that the unavoidable traffic jam created when the main chamber at the Chain of Rocks Locks 27 had to be closed recently for emergency repairs, is over.

When the towboat Jack B. Wofford with 15 barges entered the just-reopened 1200-foot main chamber at the locks Wednesday, August 11, at 5:50 p.m., she was the first of 52 tows that had been waiting more than 48 hours to transit through the larger of the lock's two chambers. The main chamber was closed July 26 for emergency repairs to cross braces on the lock's miter gates at its south end.

During the 42-hour period from reopening, up to noon, August 13, lock operators at the Corps of Engineers facility conducted 90 lockages, passing through a total of 860 barges carrying 967,000 tons of commodities. This total was achieved using the main chamber for the larger tows of up to 15 barges and the 600-foot auxiliary chamber for smaller tows. The total includes transits in both north and southbound directions.

Commercial navigation interests have warmly welcomed reopening of the main chamber through which large 15-barge tows can pass in less than 30 minutes. The 15-barge tows are the largest tows that operate on the upper reaches of the Mississippi River and into the Illinois River.

In addition to the economies made possible by returning the main chamber to operation, Chris Brescia, President of Midwest Area River Coalition 2000, noted that 1200-foot lock chambers are inherently safer for deck crews than their shorter counterparts. "They can lock a 15-barge tow through a 1200-foot chamber without having to break it into two sections. Tows must be 'cut' into two sections to lock through a chamber shorter than the entire tow, deck hands must manually detach heavy cables connecting the barges and then reattach them after the two sections have been locked separately," he said. "While this is strenuous work in the best weather, such as the region has enjoyed through most of the delay, it is tougher and more dangerous in extreme weather conditions," he added.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials in St. Louis report that while continuing excessive ground water elevations prevented them from repairing both the top and bottom of the lock gate cross braces, inspections of the gate bottoms by divers confirmed that only one of 16 tensioning rods is broken. All 16 top rods have been replaced, where seven had been broken by stresses from operating the 70-foot tall gates. While officials calculate that they have significantly reduced the danger of catastrophic failure of the gates, they acknowledge that the gates are the original gates that were built on site and installed 51 years ago. The only long-term fix for this will be replacing the gates during a possible future major rehabilitation of the aging structure.