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St. Louis District®

News Release

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Dredging and Surveying Crews Work to Keep Navigation Moving on the Mississippi River

ST. LOUIS, November 16 – As the Mississippi, Illinois, Missouri and Ohio river levels continue their record low water trends, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, working closely with the U.S. Coast Guard and the navigation industry, is maintaining continuous dredging operations to keep the region's waterways open to navigation and commerce. The dredging season began July 30 and normally ends in December.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District Chief of Operations Peggy O'Bryan explained today that the current river conditions and the forecast for the weeks ahead are being watched closely.

"The lack of rainfall across the region is an obvious reason for concern," O'Bryan said. "We will be able to keep the channel open for navigation, but this also requires the coordination of all parties involved."

One of those parties is the U.S. Coast Guard, which issued a low water advisory two days ago, recommending tow sizes and advising of possible draft restrictions in the near future. (*see the latest U.S. Coast Guard navigation notices - <http://www.ribb.com/navnotice.html>*)

"We consider it essential when it comes to waterway management," said Capt. Suzanne Englebert, Commander, Marine Safety Office, St. Louis, referring to the cooperation between the Coast Guard, Corps of Engineers and the navigation industry.

Although the Corps of Engineers maintains the navigation channel and the Coast Guard may issue restrictions on navigation, every decision is taken in-step with the River Industry Action Committee. RIAC is a river industry organization that works to promote safe navigation on river systems, including the Mississippi River, which records more than 300 million tons of commodities shipped annually.

Presently, Dredge Potter, is operating at Mississippi River mile 16 (four miles downstream of Thompson Landing) but will be moving to just upstream of the Mississippi River's confluence with the Ohio River by the end of the week.

In addition to Dredge Potter, the dredge America is working near the old LaGrange Lock, Illinois River mile 77 and will move downstream one mile to dredge shoaling at mile 76.

According to O'Bryan, the St. Louis Harbor remains a concern and is being watched closely.

"If the channel in St. Louis Harbor needs some work, we will probably bring America down to do it, depending on where Potter is," she said.

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2-2-2-2 Corps Works to Keep Navigation Moving

Survey boats, both Corps operated as well as contractor vessels, are used to determine the condition of the river channel. Presently, the St. Louis District's survey boat, M/V Pathfinder, is surveying the Mississippi River's channel near Cairo, Ill. At the same time, a contracted survey boat has scanned the upper portion of the Chain of Rocks Canal and is currently operating in the St. Louis Harbor, below the Chain of Rocks Canal.

These low water conditions aren't unique to the region, though. Drought conditions, which have plagued the upper Midwest in recent years, have also spread into the Upper Mississippi and Illinois river basins, contributing to low river stages. Lower than normal rainfall amounts have also hampered navigation on the Ohio River, which was closed for several days in August due to shoaling.

Update: Locks 27 Auxiliary Chamber Closure

Work continues with lift gate machinery and counterweight replacement for the auxiliary lock at Locks 27 on the Chain of Rocks Canal in Granite City, Ill. The work, requiring the closure of the auxiliary chamber, commenced on October 17 and is on scheduled to be completed by December 13.

"So far, Midwest (Foundations, Inc.) has removed all the old machinery" said Jay Fowler, resident engineer for the project. "The new equipment has been successfully load tested so installation could begin as early as late this week or early next week."

Closing the auxiliary lock is the first part of the project to replace the lift gate machinery and counterweights for both lock chambers, which, due to their age, are at an unacceptable level of risk for failure and increase the possibility of unscheduled closures. During the second phase, the main chamber will be closed from January 3 to March 1, 2006.

In order to best accommodate navigation needs, the 600-foot auxiliary chamber is being serviced first. Closing the smaller lock first allows the 1,200-foot main chamber to remain open during the heavier traffic periods of fall and early winter when the grain harvest is being transported down the Mississippi River to Louisiana ports.

There are also other advantages to performing the maintenance on the auxiliary lock first.

"The work that will be done on the main chamber is almost a mirror image of that which is being done on the auxiliary lock," Fowler said. "It gives us the opportunity to do lessons-learned on anything unexpected we might have encountered on the first set of repairs."

Editor's note: Media interested in visiting Locks 27 during the installation of the auxiliary lock's new machinery and counterweights are asked to contact the Public Affairs Office at 314-331-8002/8068/8095.