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of Engineers**
St. Louis District®

Press Release

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Dredging Season on Middle Mississippi Comes to a Close

ST. LOUIS – A successful dredging season will draw to a close this weekend for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District. Today the District's Dredge Potter will conclude dredging operations at River Mile 31 near Commerce, Mo., and is expected to arrive tomorrow at the Service Base at the Foot of Arsenal to begin demobilization. The contract Dredge America completed its work yesterday and will winter below the Kaskaskia Lock and Dam near River Mile 118 on the Upper Mississippi River.

Due to existing and expected low water conditions, the District's Dredge Potter was activated July 13, 19 days before its expected activation of August 1. Dredge America, a contract dredge owned and operated by Great Lakes Dredge and Dock Company of Oak Brook, Ill., was activated September 4.

Together the two dredges have completed 55 jobs, removing over 6.7 million cubic yards of sediment from the navigation channel. Lance Engle, dredging project manager for the St. Louis District, explained that would be enough sediment to cover 314 football fields, including the end zones, to a depth of 10 feet.

Removing that sediment ensures that there is a minimum of 9 feet of water in the navigation channel. Recent rains and warm weather conditions have caused the Mississippi River at St. Louis to rise to 5.2 feet, today, providing approximately 18 feet of water in the navigation channel.

The District is responsible for maintaining a 9 foot deep, 300 foot wide navigation channel on 300 miles of the Mississippi River from Saverton, Mo., to Cairo, Ill., the lower 80 miles of the Illinois River and the lower 36 miles of the Kaskaskia River. The District uses dredging operations, locks and dams and channel improvement structures, such as dikes and chevrons, to do this.

Jim Pierce, captain of the Dredge Potter, is proud of the job his crew has done this year. "We have completed 38 jobs on over 250 miles of river and pumped over 5.2 million cubic yards of sand," Capt. Pierce said. "The crew responded quickly to shallow areas and pumped a lot of sand. If it wasn't for the crew we wouldn't have been able to get the job done, and I'm very proud of them. They work 24 hours, 7 days a week. They're the ones that make it happen."

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The crew responded to two critical situations this year, providing dredging assistance on the Ohio River following a sever fall in water levels, an effort that was recognized with a Commander's Award earlier this month, and they responding to an emerging situation south of the Jefferson Barracks Bridge in St. Louis where three tows reported bumping.

Industry is pleased with the quick response and the overall dredging season, according to Sammy Dickey, chairman of the River Industry Action Committee, a coalition of tow companies and other navigation interests.

"The Dredge Potter got out a head of schedule this year and we really appreciate that," Dickey said. "I've been in recent contact with several tow companies and they are very pleased with the channel's condition. The dredging crews have done an excellent job preparing the channel for this winter's forecasted low water conditions. The industry is heavily reliant on their work, and their efforts ensure that millions of dollars worth of commodities make it to their final destination."

While the dredges will winter for the season, they could be reactivated if the need arose. Capt. Pierce explained it would take two to four days to reassemble the crew, order supplies, fuel and food, and refit the dredge so it could start work again. "As soon as we can mobilize, we would head out to the job and start dredging," he said.

Remobilization would only take place though if there was an imminent channel closure or a tow grounding and the channel was closed, explained Engle. The District's dredging project manager went on to explain that ice could play a factor in the dredge's ability to remobilize.

"If we start to see ice flows in St. Louis, we probably wouldn't dredge," Engle said. Ice conditions hamper dredging operations, as ice will clog water intakes and larger ice flows can damage the pipeline. It also puts pressure on the dredge's buoy cables, possibly causing them to break.

"Basically, once we see ice in St. Louis, we are stuck with the river we have," he said. "That's why we work so hard to complete dredging operations prior to late December."

Fluctuating river levels require a close working relationship between U.S. Army Corps of Engineers personnel, the U.S. Coast Guard, the Weather Service and the river industry. As required, low water teleconferences are conducted with all parties to discuss current and expected river levels. While river levels in St. Louis are in the positive range, thanks largely to the recent winter storm and the subsequent ice melt, the river is expected to fall again without additional rains. The Corps will continue to work with all concerned agencies to ensure the best navigation channel possible is available to river traffic.

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Editor's Note: Media interested in digital pictures of Dredge Potter can contact the Public Affairs Office at 314-331-8002/8644. After hours, contact Alan Dooley at 618-719-9039 or 618-939-5985, or Nicole Dalrymple at 314-575-1521.