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Lock 24 at Clarksville, Mo., restored to unrestricted operation

St. Louis, Mo. – May 18, 2009 - Unrestricted operations have been restored at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Lock 24 in Clarksville, Mo. Last Friday, after a barge tow grounded while approaching the lock from the north, restrictions were placed on tow sizes until the shoaling that caused the grounding could be mapped and removed.

Tows were limited to 70 feet wide, 400 feet long and a draft of 6.5 feet. Lifting that limit again enables tows of up to 15 barges, or some 105 feet wide and nearly 1,200 feet long, with drafts greater than 9 feet again to be accommodated.

An emergency contract was executed with Wayne V. Smith, Inc., of Louisiana, Mo., to excavate the sediment that caused the grounding. The work has been completed and the backlog of barge tows has been eliminated with full service being restored. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers survey vessel MV Pathfinder has marked the channel and remains on scene to survey the area to identify any possible added requirements for safe navigation.

Corps of Engineers navigation experts explained that the pool above Lock 24 had been drawn down last week to accommodate anticipated high river flows. That lowered the river's elevation at that point. Combined with shoaling from sediment deposits at the scene, water depths fell to about 7.5 feet in some places. The Corps of Engineers is mandated to maintain depths of 9 or more feet with a minimum channel width of 300 feet. Rising water and dredging have combined to restore needed depths.

Corps of Engineers Navigation Chief Andy Schimpf credited great teamwork with rapidly restoring safe navigation at the scene.

"A commercial tow identified the problem and the U.S. Coast Guard quickly posted necessary restrictions while we mapped the problem," he said. "A local contractor answered the call on an emergency basis over the weekend. By Monday, nature, dredging and industry cooperation had the problem under control."

Lock and Dam 24 is on the right descending bank at Clarksville, Mo. It is the northernmost lock and dam in the St. Louis District area of responsibility. Its main chamber is 600 feet long and passed more than 23 million tons of cargoes on nearly 2,400 vessels in 2008. The facility went into operation March 12, 1940.