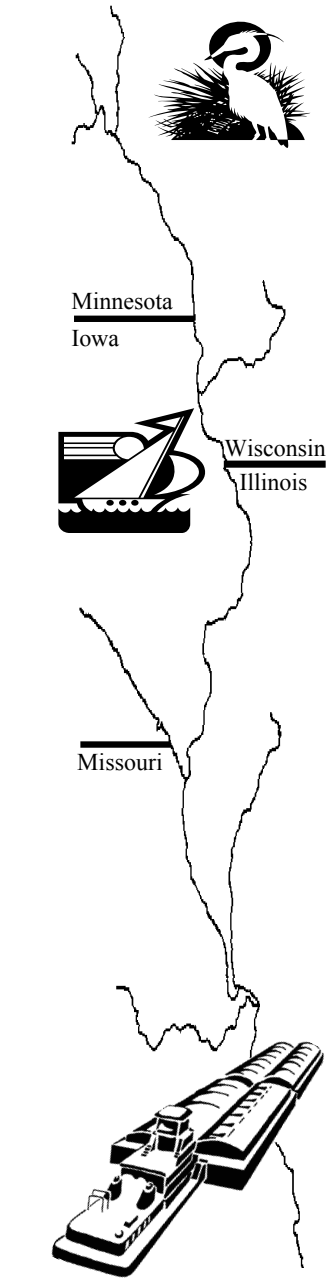
US Army Corps of Engineers

Upper Mississippi River - Illinois Waterway System Navigation Study

UMR-IWW System Navigation Study Newsletter | August 2002 | Vol. 8 No. 2



Study Blueprint Completed

"Most challenging work" still ahead

The document that will guide the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in completing the restructured Navigation Study of the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway System has been completed and published on the study's web page.

The 200-plus page Interim Report to the Feasibility Study summarizes the study findings to date. It also describes a major shift in purpose from the project's inception in 1993 as a single-purpose study focused on navigation issues. The Feasibility Report, scheduled for completion in 2004, will include an evaluation of navigation improvement measures and ecosystem restoration opportunities.

Collaboration is a key theme in both the restructured project and the report's narrative. Preparing the blueprint to complete the Feasibility Study provided a good test of the collaborative process.

"We are demonstrating that environmental and economic sustainability can coexist," says Brig. Gen. Edwin J. Arnold, commander of the Corps' Mississippi Valley Division. "Possibly even more significant is the collaborative relationship that has developed among the key federal agencies involved, both at the national and regional level."

Similarly, the restructured study has benefited from active participation from the five Upper Mississippi River states and stakeholders representing navigation, agriculture and natural resources interests.

More than 500 comments from various organizations were submitted to the study team after it released a draft of the report. Some of those comments influenced the direction of the report, and others were addressed in a question-and-answer section. The depth of the comments demonstrated that stakeholders took a lot of time to read and understand the report, says Project Manager Denny Lundberg. "The comments show a commitment on their part to the collaborative process."

Most of the comments submitted to the study team indicated strong support for the new study emphasis on sustainability, and the collaborative partners have pledged to continue their active collaboration with the Corps through publication of a Feasibility Study in 2004.

"The Interim Report sets the stage for what we need to address collaboratively to reach a final conclusion on a preferred alternative," says Chris Brescia, president of Midwest Area River Coalition 2000, a coalition of agricultural commodity groups, grain companies and waterway carriers. But he and other stakeholders say they're ready to move ahead to the even more challenging work of forging consensus.

continued on page 2

Inside this issue

continued from page 1

"We're going to have to find a flexible enough process to develop solutions not only to address the concerns of the navigation industry but to redress the neglect of 100-plus years of environmental impact," says Mark Beorkrem, co-director of the Mississippi River Protection Project for the Sierra Club. "I'm hopeful the feasibility work process will inform us as to workable solutions."

Holly Stoerker, executive director of the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association—a regional interstate organization founded by the Governors of the five basin states to coordinate river-related programs and policies, says the study team has made a "tremendous effort" to keep people involved and informed and hopes the groups can just as successfully meet the true test of collaboration yet to come. "Collaboration involves taking a consensus view," she says. "That's where we haven't really gone yet."

Report At a Glance

The Interim Report details the complete process by which the restructured study will identify potential navigation improvements and ecosystem restoration measures. It also provides substantial evidence to support the comment made by several stakeholders that "the most challenging work is still ahead."

"We've got to stop talking about how we're going to restructure the study and get on with study activities," Lundberg says. The biggest challenge will be completing the economic and environmental evaluations and bringing them together at the end into an integrated, sustainable plan—something never before done at this multi-state, system-wide scale. "The restructured study presents unique opportunities for the basin."

Measures being carried forward for evaluation include non-structural measures like congestion tolls and tradeable lockage permits, as well as structural measures like mooring cells, guidewall extensions, lock extensions and new locks. Ecosystem restoration measures under consideration include fish passage structures, rehabilitation of backwaters, channels and islands, and action to reduce river traffic during certain times of the year. Navigation improvement and ecosystem restoration measures will be combined into alternative plans, and those will be evaluated using environmental goals and objectives established by the stakeholders as well as a variety of future world "scenarios" described on Page 4.

While the report does not make early recommendations, it does suggest the potential need for changes in the existing Corps' statutory authority. And while the team has the authority to identify a full range of ecosystem improvements, for example, it may not yet have the necessary authority to implement them.

The plan outlined in the report is ambitious, team members say, but it also represents an unprecedented opportunity to overcome a long history of polarization among stakeholders on the river, and also to bring together the resources of groups with similar concerns.

"As a result of collaboration, the stakeholders have been able to better understand the different interactions on the system between the ecology and economic uses," says Ken Barr, the team's environmental and historic properties leader. "Since we are looking at this from a dual-purpose perspective now, we should be able to get the information organized in such a way that we can really identify places where economic and environmental uses complement each other, as well as areas where there are truly conflicts."

A complete copy of the Interim Report can be found at: *http://www2.mvr.usace.army.mil/umr-iwwsns/.* ◆

What's Next?

Because environmental restoration is a new addition to the original navigation study, many of the tasks still to be completed involve working with the stakeholders in the establishment of environmental sustainability goals and objectives for the condition of the river ecosystem and the evaluation of various ecosystem improvement alternatives.

Over the next several months, the study team will meet with river stakeholders to establish, through intensive collaboration, a desired state for the system's environmental resources. At the same time, the team will continue to move forward with economic evaluations. The scenario analysis results have been given to the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, which will run different traffic scenarios through the study's economic models.

Tentative plans for both navigation improvements and environmental restoration will be identified by October 2003. Following is a list of other timeline highlights:

Aug.2002-Sept. 2003	Alternative Evaluations
October 2003	Public Meetings on Tentative Alternatives
November 2003	Alternative Formulation Briefing
April 2004	Draft Feasibility Report and NEPA Document
April-June 2004	Ninety-day public review
May 2004	Study conclusion public meetings
August 2004	Final Feasibility Report with Environmental Impact State-
ment	
November 2004	Chief of Engineers report signed

Federal Group Endorses Study

The Federal Principals Group—made up of Washington-level representatives of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Transportation—has strongly endorsed the study framework laid out in the Interim Report. In a letter included in full in the Interim Report, the group:

- Endorsed the scenarios as capturing the plausible range of future navigation system traffic over the 50-year planning horizon.
- Endorsed an "adaptive management" process by which the Corps will alter plans as needed in response to changing conditions and emerging science.
- Endorsed adding ecosystem restoration as an authorized purpose of the study as well as an implementation plan that incorporates 100 percent federal and cost-shared components.
- Supported the use of the existing though controversial economic models while research and development on improved models moves forward, but within the context of an adaptive management process that would review study results as new models are developed and accepted.
- Approved the planned process of developing a range of measures representing progressive levels of investment in navigation improvement (structural and non-structural) and ecosystem restoration measures.
- Applauded the collaborative process used in restarting the study and preparing the Interim Report and encouraged continued collaboration through completion of the Feasibility Study and implementation of possible recommendations. The group also supported continued involvement of agencies represented in the Federal Principals Group, saying the group's resources would help insure the river system remains both a nationally significant transportation system and ecosystem resource. ◆

SCENARIOS DEVELOPED

One key feature of the Interim Report was the development of five scenarios that will be used to describe future demand for the transportation of farm products on the Upper Mississippi River System. The scenarios examine a range of policies, conditions and events that could impact U.S. agriculture and export markets and result in a given level of traffic on the waterway. The five chosen scenarios describe a range of export scenarios from the "least" to "most" favorable for U.S. exports. Under the central U.S. export scenario, some 64.3 million metric tons of farm products would be carried on the river system in the year 2050, with a total for all commodities estimated at 130.7 million metric tons. The projected tonnage ranges across the scenarios, however, from as low as 78.8 million metric tons total for the least favorable trade scenario to a high of 137.7 million metric tons for the most favorable trade scenario. Those compare to the 81.8 million metric tons actually carried on the river in the year 2000.

The study team does not intend to select any single most likely scenario, but to evaluate all alternatives across the broad range and focus on those that work well under a variety of different future world conditions. ◆

Study Questions and Answers

Following is a sampling of comments submitted to the study team about the Interim Report and the team's responses.

Comment: *Why does the Interim Report not contain interim recommendations for implementation of ecosystem and navigation improvement measures?*

Response: The guidance for restructuring of the navigation study allowed for identification of measures that could be recommended for implementation prior to completion of the Feasibility Study. The Interim Report does not contain any recommendations for moving forward with interim measures. Many comments were received that suggested small-scale measures such as mooring cells and guidewall extensions be considered for immediate implementation. These measures have been discussed in past efforts; however, the economic evaluations of small-scale measures has not been completed. In addition, the environmental analysis describing the impacts of incremental traffic increases from these types of measures is also not complete. Both of these evaluations will be included in the Feasibility Study to allow for selection of a recommended plan.

Comment: *Will probabilities be assigned to the scenarios?*

Response: As currently constructed, individual scenarios will not be evaluated with respect to numerical probability or likelihood of occurrence. A single most probable without-project condition therefore will not be identified. The intent is to evaluate alternatives across all scenarios and identify those that best meet the evaluation criteria across the range of scenarios. This type of scenario-based assessment is not the traditional method in Corps feasibility studies; however, the scenario-based approach is consistent with *Economic and Environmental Principles and Guidelines for Water and Related Land Resources Implementation Studies*, the procedural and analytical framework for Corps feasibility studies. In consideration of comments from the stakeholders, options for identifying probabilities, as part of a sensitivity analysis, will be explored in the Feasibility Study. An Independent Technical Review is also underway that will include exploring the practicality of identifying probabilities for each scenario.

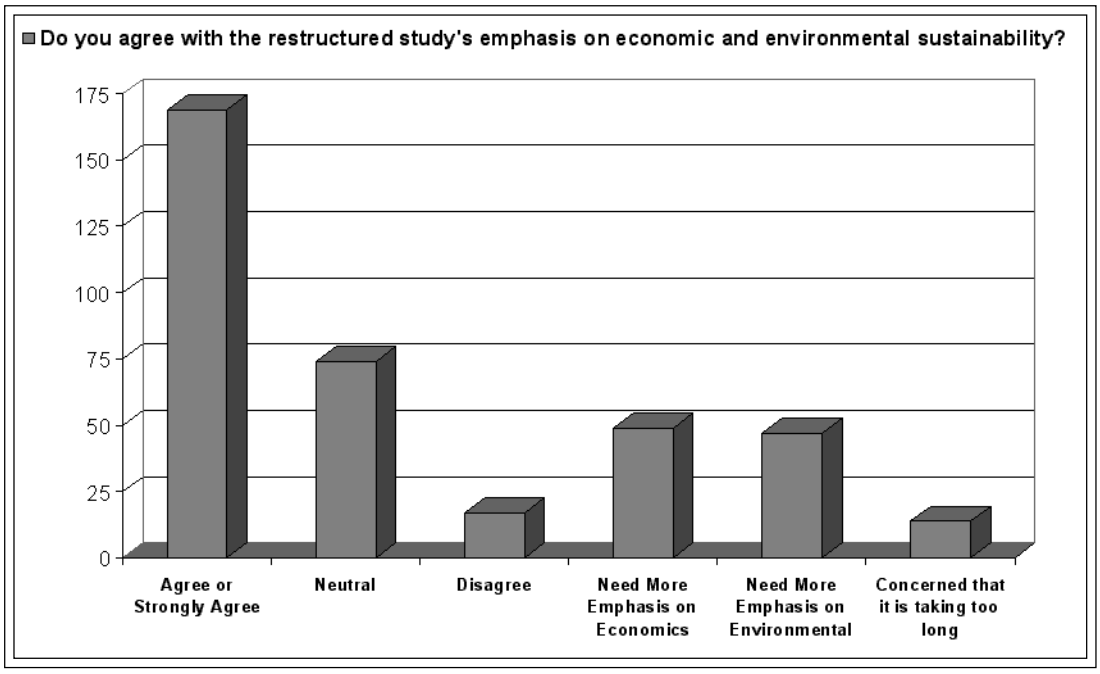
Comment: *Why is the Tow Cost Model being used instead of the spatial model previously used in this study?*

Response: The National Research Council concluded that the spatial model utilized in the original study was a step in the right direction; however, it contained flawed assumptions and data. Their recommendation was not to use the ESSENCE model in the Feasibility Study. They did, however, recommend that further development of the spatial model and additional data collection should be accomplished to support the Feasibility Study. The initial estimate to fully comply with the NRC recommendation was many years and considerable funding. The Corps, in coordination with the Federal Principals Group, concluded that further development of a spatial model was a good idea but that it should be performed in a research and development model outside the study process. They also concluded that an existing model should be used to complete the Feasibility Study as soon as possible. The Two Cost model was selected as the tool to evaluated the NED transportation impacts associated with the various alternatives. At the same time, the Corps will explore opportunities for incorporating spatial concepts into a sensitivity analysis during the development of a recommended plan. The Corps also will continue development of a new spatial model on a parallel effort through its R&D program. As new methodologies become available, consideration will be given to incorporating them into the restructured Navigation Feasibility Study. ◆

Public Weighs in on New Study Plan

Balanced approach to economics, environment desirable, meeting attendees say.

Improvements to the Upper Mississippi River System should balance the interests of navigation and the environment. But that won't necessarily be easy to accomplish in a timely way, according to comments received at a recent series of public meetings.



Meetings were held in Peoria, Illinois; St. Louis, Missouri; Bloomington, Minnesota; La Crosse, Wisconsin; and Davenport, Iowa. Attendees submitted 258 questions, issued 120 statements and returned 305 comment sheets.

When asked if the study goal should be a balanced, sustainable approach to navigation and the environment, 79 percent agreed while only 4 percent disagreed. That sentiment was echoed in the responses to other questions. When asked, for example, if the study goal should be to improve the efficiency of the navigation system, 77 percent agreed, and 11 percent disagreed. Similarly, 75 percent of attendees agreed the goal should be sustaining a healthier ecosystem, while 11 percent disagreed.

Many also agreed with the need to take ecosystem protection a step further. Sixty-six percent of respondents said the study goal should be to restore the river habitat.

Several attendees expressed concern, however, that the goal would not be achieved—in particular, that environmental needs would not truly have equal weight in the decision-making process. On the flip side, some of those who favored river improvements worried that the addition of environmental restoration as a study objective could slow the potential implementation of navigation improvements.

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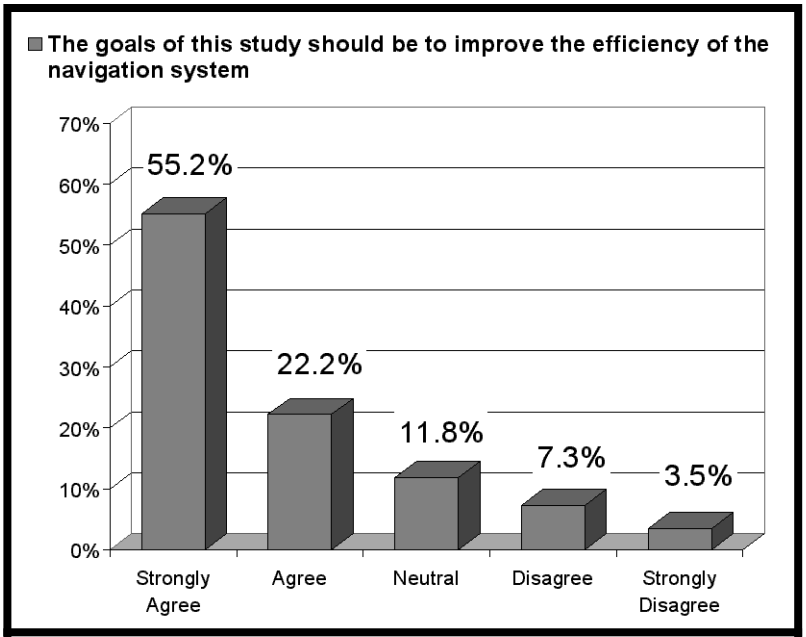

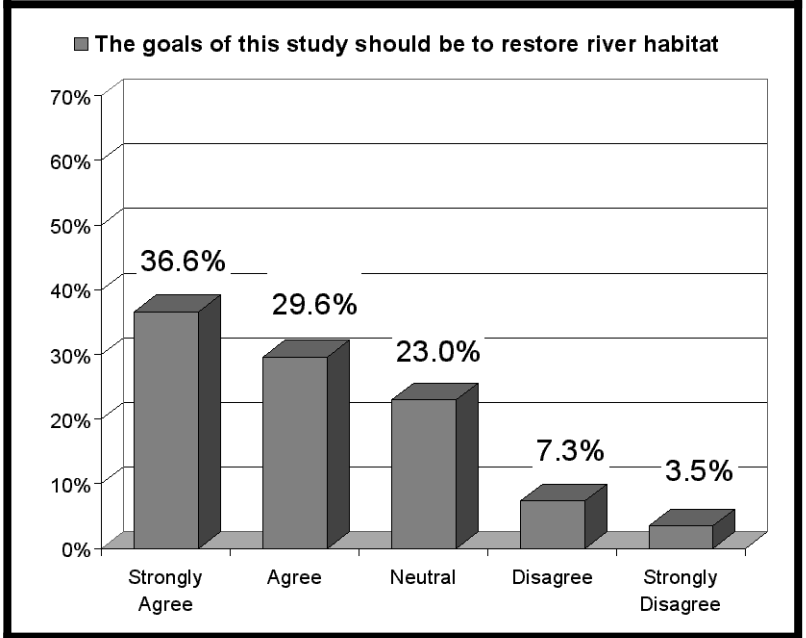

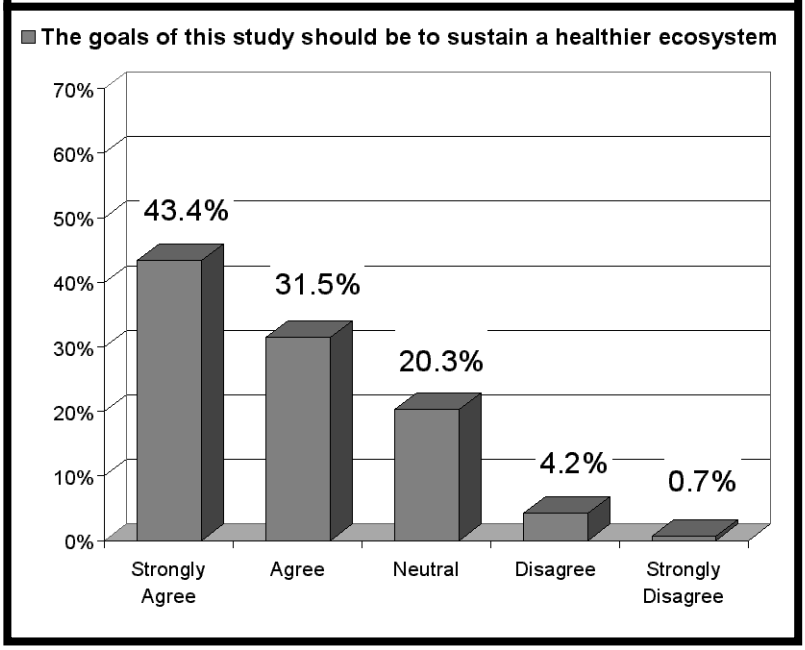

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The March meetings offered the first comprehensive look at the restructured Navigation Study. They also gave the study team the opportunity to gather input from the general public and collaborative partners. Many of the comments and suggestions have been integrated into the study's Interim Report.

Nearly everyone (90 percent) who attended the meetings said the presentation gave them a better understanding of the study and that the format offered the opportunity for their comments to be heard. The format also represented a change from previous study meetings because representatives of agencies or groups with an interest in the river were asked to set up their own displays at the open house segments. They also were available to respond to questions as integral partners in the study effort.

The variety of comments offered in the public forums showed the strong feelings people have about the study, as well as the difficulty in balancing sometimes competing interests, even with a new dual-purpose focus.

Representatives of many groups applauded the new emphasis on sustainability and the switch from what seemed previously to be an "environment versus economics" approach to river improvements. Many still offered divergent opinions on what immediate action was needed.

At the meeting in Peoria, for example, one attendee suggested a five-to-10 year moratorium on river traffic growth while the river's environmental future is studied. But at the St. Louis meeting, a representative of a grain association said navigation should be upgraded without further delay. "When we build a new highway, we don't wait until traffic is at a standstill," he said.

Each meeting included three open house sessions and a formal public meeting that concluded with public comments and questions.◆

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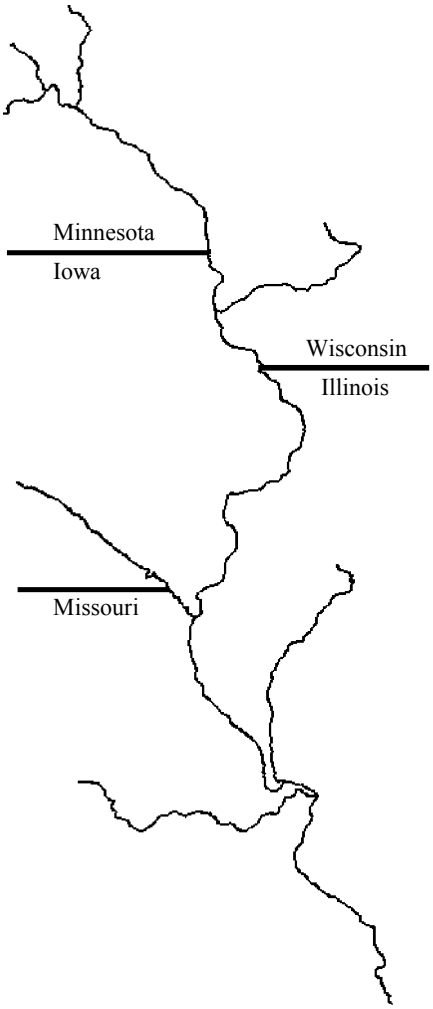

US Army Corps of Engineers

August 2002

UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER - ILLINOIS WATERWAY SYSTEM NAVIGATION STUDY
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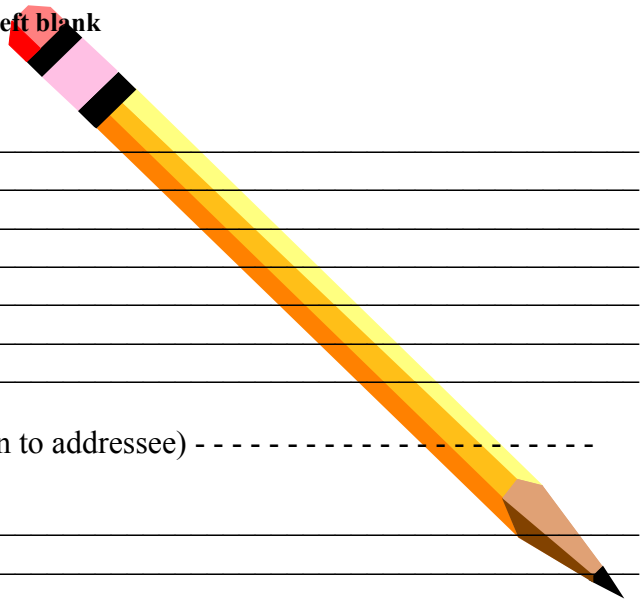

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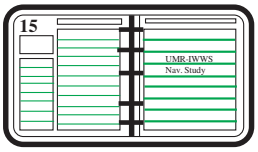
NGO's Meet with Study Team, Federal Principals Task Force

The study team met in Washington D.C. in June for the first time with national-level representatives of NGO's (non-governmental organizations) with an interest in the Navigation Study. The animated discussion opened a dialogue with some of the project's most vocal critics. Participants represented both economic and environmental interests and included members of the Environmental Defense Fund, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), National Corn Growers and others.

The meeting allowed NGO representatives the chance to voice concerns both to the Corps of Engineers and to federal agencies represented on the Federal Principals Group. ◆



Upcoming Meetings

Governors' Liaison Committee

November 19, 2002 1 p.m. - 4 p.m.
Holiday Inn Select International Airport
Three Appletree Square
(I-494 & 34th Avenue South)
Bloomington, MN

February 25, 2003 1 p.m. - 4 p.m.
Four Points By Sheraton
226 - 17th Street
Rock Island, IL

Check 1-800-872-8822 for final meeting times and locations.

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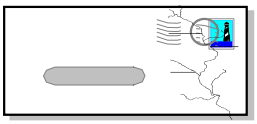

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Environmental Advisory Group discusses sustainability

The Environmental Advisory Board, a 30-year-old committee that advises the Chief of Engineers on environmental issues facing the Corps of Engineers, met April 11 in Rock Island to discuss the addition of environmental sustainability as a component of the Navigation Study of the Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway system.

Board members endorsed the new study direction, saying it was a good example of the new emphasis on sustainability as well as integrating "customers" into study processes. "I think the results to date have exceeded our wildest expectations," said Lt. Gen. Robert Flowers, Chief of Engineers. The meetings included a time for public comments to attending board members. They included: Dr. Theodore L. Hullar, director, higher education programs for The Atlantic Philanthropic Service Company, Inc.; Virginia B. Wetherell, owner, Wetherell Consulting; and Dr. Michael J. Donahue, president and chief executive officer, Great Lakes Commission.◆

Questions?

❍ For general study information, call Denny Lundberg, regional project manager, at 309/794-5632, write ATTN: CEMVR-PM, or visit our home page at: **http://www2.mvr.usace.army.mil/umr-iwwsns/**

❍ For information on Public Involvement meetings, call the toll-free telephone number, 800/USA(872)8822. Meeting announcements will be in the Public Involvement menu. Or call Kevin Bluhm, public involvement coordinator, at 651/290-5247, or write to the address below, ATTN: CEMVR-PM-A.

❍ To be added to the mailing list for future newsletters, study updates, and meeting announcements, write to the address below, ATTN: CEMVR-PM-A, or call the toll-free telephone number and leave your information in the Public Involvement menu.

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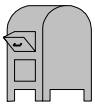

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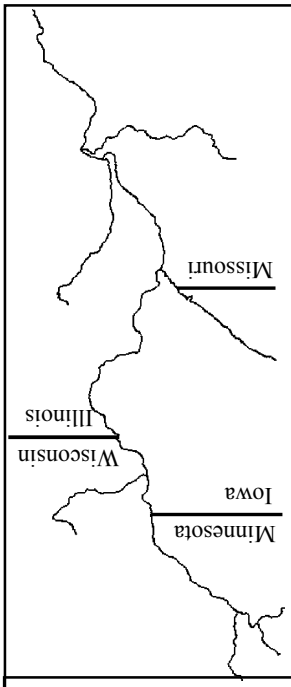

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