



Upper
Mississippi River
Basin Association

ILLINOIS, IOWA, MINNESOTA, MISSOURI, WISCONSIN

March 2, 2009

Brigadier General Michael J. Walsh
Division Commander
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Mississippi Valley Division
P.O. Box 80
Vicksburg, Mississippi 39181-0080

Dear General Walsh:

At its February 17, 2009 meeting, the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association (UMRBA) was pleased to hear from Ms. Elizabeth Ivy of your staff regarding the pending Advisory Panel mandated as part of the ecosystem restoration authority enacted in Title VIII of the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 (WRDA 07). UMRBA's member States certainly appreciated the opportunity to work collaboratively with District staff and other program stakeholders on the initial draft proposal for the Advisory Panel. Having now had the opportunity to review the recommendations you submitted to HQUSACE on February 11, 2009, we would like to share a few key State perspectives regarding the Advisory Panel, and institutional arrangements more broadly on the Upper Mississippi River System (UMRS).

As you know, UMRBA is the organization established by the Governors of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin to represent the States' common water resource interests, coordinate the states' river-related programs and policies, and work with Federal agencies that have river responsibilities. As such, we have both nurtured and valued the very strong partnership that has developed among the States, Federal agencies, and various nongovernmental groups working on the UMRS over the years.

UMRBA certainly understands and appreciates the importance of elevating the profile of the Upper Mississippi River System in general, and the navigation improvements and ecosystem restoration authorized in Title VIII of WRDA 07 in particular. However, there are also inherent limitations in an Advisory Panel comprised of State agency directors and Federal regional directors. From the States' perspective, the most significant issues are as follows:

1. ***A system-level group able to operate at the policy/technical nexus is essential*** — While your February 11 Advisory Panel proposal clearly allows for the possibility of a system working group, the States would encourage you to consider explicitly recommending the formation of such a group. There are numerous functions that will not be feasible for a director-level panel to perform, but that are nevertheless essential to the successful implementation of the ecosystem restoration authority.

415 Hamm Building
408 St. Peter Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55102
Phone: 651-224-2880
Fax: 651-223-5815
www.umrba.org

Acknowledging the need for the system-level working group would reinforce the intended scope and purpose of the Advisory Panel, and thus increase the likelihood of achieving the desired level of representation on the Advisory Panel. As the States have indicated previously, we view the existing Environmental Management Program Coordinating Committee as an excellent model for working-level program coordination at the system scale.

2. ***A director-level Advisory Panel must be carefully focused*** — Most panel members at the director level will have limited direct knowledge of UMRS ecosystem management issues, and will understandably have limited time to devote to Advisory Panel work. In this regard, the sample letter contained as an attachment to your February 11 proposal presents some concerns, in that it calls for the panel members to attend “potentially up to four formal meetings per year at different locations along the river system; to coordinate between meetings; and to coordinate review of numerous technical and decision documents within their agencies/organizations.” This goes beyond the level of commitment described earlier in your proposal. We assume that the descriptions in the first part of the proposal more clearly reflect your intent. If so, we would encourage modification of the sample letter, to avoid potential misunderstanding by recipients. For the Advisory Panel to be effective, demands on its members must be carefully focused on those things for which they are uniquely suited, such as raising the River’s profile and ensuring top-level support for navigation and ecosystem improvements. The policy and technical details of program implementation will be more effectively and efficiently addressed by the system-level group described above.

We sincerely thank you and your staff for your commitment to partnership and your openness to considering the States’ perspectives on these important questions concerning the Advisory Panel and related institutional arrangements. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these ideas further with you or your staff if you would find that to be helpful.

Sincerely,



Barbara L. Naramore
Executive Director

cc: Colonel Robert A. Sinkler, Commander, Rock Island District
Colonel Jon L. Christensen, Commander, St. Paul District
Colonel Thomas E. O’Hara, Jr., Commander, St. Louis District