



Upper
Mississippi River
Basin Association

ILLINOIS, IOWA, MINNESOTA, MISSOURI, WISCONSIN

July 15, 2009

LTC Michael Clarke, District Engineer
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Rock Island District
Clock Tower Building
P.O. Box 2004
Rock Island, Illinois 61204-2004

Dear Colonel Clarke:

The Upper Mississippi River Basin Association (UMRBA) is pleased to express its continued and enthusiastic support for the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP) as you prepare the required Implementation Report for the program's Congressional authorizing committees. Through NESP, Congress gave the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers a groundbreaking mandate to implement a dual purpose, integrated plan essential to the sustainable management of the Upper Mississippi River System (UMRS) as a nationally significant ecosystem and nationally significant commercial navigation system. The states are confident that NESP stands poised to make invaluable contributions to the UMRS, and thus the nation.

With NESP still awaiting its first dollar of Construction General funding, there obviously are limits to the progress that can be documented in this first Implementation Report. However, working with program partners and stakeholders since NESP was authorized in the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 (WRDA 07), the Corps has been laying the groundwork for efficient and effective execution of both NESP's navigation improvement and ecosystem restoration elements. On the restoration side, which is the focus of this required Implementation Report, substantial progress has been made in several areas, including developing ecosystem goals and objectives at multiple scales, planning individual projects, crafting a thoughtful plan for the potential transition of the Environmental Management Program (EMP) into NESP, and proposing an approach to standing up the required NESP Advisory Panel. This first Implementation Report will be a critical vehicle informing Congress, and leaders in the Administration, about the important progress that has been made.

In connection with those efforts, UMRBA's member states of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin would like to highlight the following perspectives, all of which we have shared previously in various contexts:

1. On February 11, 2009, General Walsh submitted his recommendations for establishing the Advisory Panel mandated in WRDA 07 to help guide implementation of NESP's ecosystem restoration component. Those recommendations call for a higher level of representation on the Advisory Panel than was envisioned by the program partnership. UMRBA understands and appreciates the importance of elevating the profile of the Upper Mississippi River System in general, and the navigation improvements and ecosystem

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restoration authorized in NESP in particular. However, the states are equally aware that there are inherent limitations in an Advisory Panel composed of state agency directors and federal regional directors. To maintain the extraordinary partnership that has developed among the states, federal agencies, and various nongovernmental groups working on the UMRS, it is essential that the Advisory Panel as proposed be supplemented with a system-level working group able to operate at the policy/technical nexus. It is also important that the Advisory Panel be focused on those things for which its executive-level members are uniquely suited.

2. The states fully recognize the need for a rational, efficient transition from EMP to NESP, but also believe that no transition should actually take place unless and until NESP is operational and sufficiently funded to provide a solid foundation for the integration of the two programs. The states strongly support the three key transition principles identified in the transition plan General Walsh submitted to Corps Headquarters on June 18, 2009.
3. At its May 21, 2009 meeting, the EMP Coordinating Committee endorsed a FY 2010-2014 Strategic and Operational Plan for the Long Term Resource Monitoring Program (LTRMP). This plan reflects extensive coordination among the partners and should guide future LTRMP implementation, regardless of whether the LTRMP is operating under EMP or NESP during this period.

With enactment of WRDA 07, Congress created a historic opportunity to modernize infrastructure, create jobs, and address habitat needs on America's greatest river system. However, there are challenges to realizing this opportunity, including overall fiscal constraints, shortfalls in the Inland Waterways Trust Fund, and the Administration's continuing reluctance to budget for NESP. The UMRBA states remain committed to working with the Corps and others to address these challenges so that NESP's dual purpose vision can be realized.

In closing, I would also like to express UMRBA's sincere appreciation of the Corps' continuing commitment to strong partnership as it implements its many missions on the UMRS.

Sincerely,



Gary R. Clark, P.E.
UMRBA Chair