

Upper Mississippi River Commission Notes

USFWS Building

Onalaska, WI

November 5, 2003

Present: Commissioners John Campe, Bill Howe, Robin Grawe, Marc Schultz, John Wetzel, Bill Burke, and Kent Pehler; Jerry Lee (Corps of Engineers), Gretchen Benjamin (Wisconsin DNR), Dave Kennedy (USGS), and Karrie Jackelen (Congressman Kind).

The meeting was called to order at 12:50 PM by Chair John Campe.

New USGS building in Onalaska: Dave Kennedy of the USGS presented the need for a new USGS building in Onalaska to carry out the mission of the Long Term Resource Monitoring Program. Currently staff are housed in two buildings, several miles apart. Their lease on Lester Ave. is up this year and they intend not to renew but to consolidate into one office building, doubling up on offices, thus saving \$450,000 a year, which has been coming out of program needs. Consolidation, he said, would save costs on the telephone system, the computer network, and receptionists salaries. The new building would be attached to the existing facility on Fanta Road, to cost \$3 million, which would be made up in cost savings over six or seven years. Currently they have \$100,000 for building design, and they need \$200,000 more. Unless there is a special appropriation of \$200,000 for design, the earliest the building could be completed would be 2008.

On the current EMP budget of \$12.2 million, Dave reported, the field stations have been minimally operative. They need \$22 million to get back to their monitoring schedule. Currently EMP funding is in conference committee, the Senate having voted \$20 million and the House \$18.5.

Regarding invasive and exotic species, Dave said that flat-lined budgets have left no resources for addressing this growing problem. The President's budget had added \$28 million to the previous USGS budget of \$895 million, including \$3 million to address invasive species problems nationally; the Senate reduced that \$3 million to \$1 million and directed it all to Mississippi State University, leaving little ability for the LTRMP to develop an early warning system regarding invasive species and little ability to work on best practices for managing them.

Gretchen Benjamin said that native species needed good habitat to compete with invasives. Kent Pehler asked about the specific threat of Asian carp, noting the sudden decline in zebra mussels. Gretchen said that while the zebras have declined, they are expected to come back and that now there are only two species of native mussels thriving in the Prairie du Chien area, whereas before the invasion of zebras there were 27. Marc said that varieties of Asian carp threatened all parts of the food chain, that they were "eating machines," and in some areas have turned habitat into "liquid carp manure," seriously degrading the economic values of the area.

Chair Campe handed the gavel to Vice-chair Howe because Campe had to leave.

Moved by Schultz, seconded by Wetzel to organize multi-state legislative meetings in Winona and Debuque to focus on the need for a new USGS building and the threat of Asian carp, the agenda to be finalized at the December MRCC meeting. Motion passed.

Election of officers was rescheduled as the first item on the December meeting agenda since Chair Campe and Commissioner Burke were no longer present.

It was reported that the treasury has \$1576.

Moved by Schultz, seconded by Pehler to approve the minutes of the last meeting. Motion passed.

Commissioner Reports:

Robin reported that three bids had been secured for the publishing of the St. Paul District Environmental Pool Plans, that the lowest bid had been determined preferable by the Fish and Wildlife Work Group, and that the agencies collectively had come up with the sum of the lowest bid plus \$500 fee for the MRCC. She also reported that Jeff DeZeller of the Corps had told her that Section 1135 funding, used to help fund the non-federal dredging for the Pool 8 drawdown, might be available for the Pool 5 drawdown and that he had asked if the MRCC would be willing to be the fiscal agent. Robin said she personally was willing and that she thought that the MRCC probably would be if a non-governmental organization could legally handle the work. Schultz commented that the MRCC should not be involved if the work would accomplish nothing and would be perceived by the public as a waste.

Moved by Schultz, seconded by Howe to approve the contract arrangement with the Fish and Wildlife Work Group. Motion passed.

Missouri River: Schultz reported that several groups have expressed a need for coordination of the navigation study with what is happening on the Missouri River.

UMRBA meeting: Robin announced that the UMRBA and coordinating groups would be meeting in La Crosse in November.

Moved by Wetzel, seconded by Pehler to call Kim Cates of Sen. Kohl's office to determine if letters to our Congressional delegation would be helpful to secure additional planning money for the USGS building. Motion passed.

Karrie Jackelen of Congressman Kind's office reported that Cong. Kind had sent a letter to Governor Doyle, who had been scheduled to meet with Gov. Pawlenty to discuss issues of common concern, to request support for the River Bill in the Senate. The acting chair asked the secretary to write to both governors requesting their support for the River Bill and drawing their attention to other river needs. Karrie reported that the bill, with support from Senator Harken, had come out of Energy and Public Works and was waiting action on the Senate floor.

Marc reported that he would be organizing the Recreational Task Force via e-mail.

Gretchen Benjamin reported that Brennan Marine was creating beaches in Pool 4 for the WDNR.

Karrie reported that regarding the EMP project for which Brennan had not yet been paid, Brennan would receive interest. She said that the Corps appreciated Brennan's concern for the EMP and that, when short of project money, gives the contractor the option to move ahead and receive payment later. Kent Pehler said that Brennan had not wanted to lay off workers.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 PM.

Notes from the morning strategy session:

It was decided by consensus to hold two Congressional briefings, one in January, either the 14th or the 21st, in Winona and one in February in Dubuque. Various members agreed to contact Federal offices to determine a preferred date.

By consensus it was agreed that the next meeting would be December 17 at Chair Campe's office in La Crescent at 10:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin Grawe, Secretary

Mississippi River Citizen Commission 2004 Work Program

Public Meetings:

Red Wing

Winona

Iowa—in coordination with rod and gun clubs

Onalaska—in partnership with the Lake Onalaska District

Work with federal officials

Meetings

Winona in January

Dubuque in February or March—develop Iowa connections

Issues

need for new USGS building

Asian carp threat

Restructuring the Mississippi River Commission to be more inclusive

Recreation needs

Nav study

EMP
Refuge needs

Recreation Task Force

Motor Vessel Mississippi Low Water Tour cooperation with COE

Explore availability of MVM to join Grand Excursion, La Crosse Riverfest

Develop connections in Iowa and above Lake Pepin

Maintain communications link to public, agencies, and elected officials via e-mail