

Upper Mississippi River Commission Notes

May 21, 2003

St. Mary's University GeoSpatial Services

Winona, MN

Present: John Campe, Bill Howe, Robin Grawe, Marc Schultz, Kent Pehler, John Wetzel, Bill Burke, Steve Lubahn of St. Mary's GeoSpatial Services, Karrie Jackelen of Congressman Kind's office, Don Hultman of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Gretchen Benjamin of the Wisconsin DNR, Tim Schlagenhaft of the Minnesota DNR, Steve Johnson of the Minnesota DNR, Mollie McGuire of *Big River* magazine, and Kevin Berg of the Corps of Engineers.

The meeting was called to order at 2:05 PM by Chair John Campe.

Moved by Marc, seconded by Kent to approve the agenda. Motion passed unanimously.

Moved by Kent, seconded by Bill H to approve the minutes of the last meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer's Report: John C. reported that the treasury had very little money.

Update from St. Mary's GeoSpatial Services (formerly Resource Studies Center): Steve Lubahn reported on the growth of the St. Mary's program, noting that they were doing work for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Michigan, Alaska, and Iowa, and expanding into the Twin Cities. He presented a pilot study for using digital cameras for a 2003 Recreational Boating Study just completed for the Recreation Work Group and announced that the McKnight Foundation had extended their grant for two years for the Upper Mississippi Basin Stakeholders' Network.

When the question arose will the boating study continue, Gretchen Benjamin said the agencies were doing their best to keep it going given limited funding, noting that Wisconsin was the only party definitively able to contribute funds. Steve Lubahn noted that the St. Mary's proposal included collecting past as well as present data in such a way as to enable trend studies that give long-term pictures. Marc noted the need for recreational money in the EMP, and Bill H. commented that the word "recreation" in Washington suggested something other than "commerce."

Recreational policy and funding issues, including draft Pool 7 Beach Plans: Robin opened the discussion noting the growing presence and challenge of various recreational uses and that at state and national agency missions and policies were often made without consideration of the complexities of the Upper Miss.

Bill H. noted that the formula for determining the amount of Wisconsin fuel tax to be designated for recreation was outdated and inadequate. Marc said that while the recreational fuel tax fund has funded the staff out there, historically recreation has not

had someone in charge; it was just done. John W. asked if there were any federal dollars allocated to recreation. Marc said there used to be federal dollars that went to the DOT's through the DNR's. Steve Johnson said that federal boating safety dollars were passed through the DNR's to sheriffs departments or to the conservation wardens and that MN boat taxes and registration fees paid for boat ramps and some salaries and that with the failure of the proposed gas tax increase, there were insufficient funds to cover the salaries of all those staff formerly covered. He added that the snowmobile industry contributed to safety training.

In answer to the question what is the need, Tim Schlagenhaft said there is a threefold need:

1. a growing conflict between users—jet skis, air boats, big boats, fishing boats— with no forum for resolution
2. environmental damage being done by large recreational boats
3. a need for good access so that we can do water level management.

He saw a need for a forum, including technical experts, marina operators, and the like and suggested the MRCC would be a good organizer.

Don Hultman noted that the problem is the fact that no governmental entity has complete jurisdiction and said that the next major forum would be the CCP public meetings. He predicted that in the future the Upper Miss will face huge issues of user conflict, issues which other rivers have handled by such mechanisms as limited use with user permits.

John C. said there were two issues: funding of recreational infrastructure and conflicting use. Kent added that we want to be assured that taxes collected are used properly.

Gretchen Benjamin pointed out that the Wisconsin gas tax dollars covered the entire state and that a boat landing in Lake Michigan costs \$1.5 million. She noted that recreational funds covered such diverse items as John Sullivan's salary and EMP cost sharing but that it was hard to use gas tax dollars for "access" dredging. She noted that the agencies in 1994 began an 18 month process to form a comprehensive recreational management plan but that implementation has been slow, limited to Pools 7 and 8 by limited funding.

John C. asked if recreation users could be categorized. Steve Johnson said drunks and not drunks. Gretchen Benjamin suggested that main channel users could be divided between large craft users coupled with personal watercraft and anglers and that backwater users could be divided into motorized users—airboats being a growing fad—and nonconsumptive, quiet users. Tim Schlagenhaft noted the conflict between airboats and ice fishing since airboats brake up ice where fisherman want to walk.

Kent noted that commercial navigation was concerned with safety issues, that drunks have a slight impact on commercial navigation, and that the industry was pushing education. He also noted delays at Lock and Dam 7 because of increased recreation use. He said that while commercial navigation is supposed to take precedence over recreational use at locks, that typically the Lock and Dam will accommodate a large group of recreation users and that navigation can easily lose 2 hours at Lock 7. He noted

that while the Navigation Feasibility study currently was considering congestion fees and regulation of traffic flow for commercial use, that there has been no mention of congestion fees or traffic regulation for recreational use.

John C. asked if there is an organized recreational group. Steve Johnson mentioned the Midwest Marina Association and noted that rationing river use was very difficult because there was no current crisis and because of dispersed authorities.

Marc noted the need for science-based sociological research.

Steve Johnson passed out reprints of numerous articles documenting environmental impacts of recreational boat use.

John C. noted the need for marina operators to be in the discussion, recognizing that boating groups tend to be loose and disorganized. Steve called recreational boating the last bastion of freedom. Molly said that she had just gotten a phone call regarding the possibility of limiting slips on the river, indicating that people were talking about the issue.

Don Hultman suggested that perhaps we needed fewer boat slips rather than more. John W. suggested the need for a central authority and dollars behind it. Gretchen Benjamin noted that the partnership designated in the Navigation Feasibility study included to enact recommendations might be an appropriate entity. Marc noted that tourism has not been included and that it wants to participate but not donate. Bill H. said we need to be alarmed about tourism in the future because much of tourism does not recognize the value of the resource, only entertainment—"a funny spectator sport."

Pool 7 Beach Plans: Don Hultman said that the FWS recommended that the plans not be finished until the CCP is completed but that since Wisconsin had dollars to spend on beach enhancement, Bob Drieslein was working to propose 5 beaches in Pools 4, 5, and 6 for maintenance this year with.

Pool Plans presentation: Tim Schlagenhaft made a slide presentation about the Pool Plans for the St. Paul District and said the plans were ready for publication.

Selection of next meeting time and place: It was decided to try to schedule a meeting in August in Winona or La Crosse coincident with the Low Water Tour of the Motor Vessel Mississippi and to meet on September 17, place to be announced.

Commissioner reports: Robin reported that Randy Urich, Chair of the Fish and Wildlife Work Group, had approached her about the possibility of the agencies contracting with MRCC to handle the publication of the Pool Plans. The printing cost was expected to be around \$10,000. The MRCC would receive an overhead fee of \$500.

Motion made a seconded to approve moving ahead with discussion for the contract. Motion passed.

Robin reported that she had made appointments with 11 offices in Washington to discuss river issues. **Motion made by Kent, seconded by Bill H. to commend Robin for the federal program fact sheets and letter to UMR legislatures, as submitted previously in email and amended to add the word “recreational” to modify dredging in the EMP Fact Sheet. Motion passed.**

Bill H. urged the agencies and the MRCC to plan presentations on the Motor Vessel Mississippi, using the opportunity particularly to educate the public about recreational boat wakes. Bill H. and Robin agreed to work together.

Karrie Jackelen of Congressman Kind’s office distributed an updated UMR Congressional Task Force membership list and announced that the river bill was before the Senate Natural Resources Committee.

Steve Johnson announced that the Mississippi River National Center in the front part of the Minnesota Science Museum would have its grand opening the weekend of August 9.

Kent announced that the Corps of Engineers, Brennan Marine, and the La Crosse County Harbor Commission would be having their third annual safety seminar on July 4, an organizational meeting to be held next week at 10:30 of May 27 at the La Crescent office of the COE. Bill H. and John expressed their intentions to participate.

Hydroelectric permit at L & D 10: Kevin Berg reported for Dick Otto regarding hydroelectric permits on Mississippi dams, noting that companies which acquire permits seem to know little about the situation.

Guidelines for use of MRCC email list: Robin solicited suggestions for more effective use of the email list, noting a desire not to overload recipients and to maintain balance.

The meeting adjourned at 4:05.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin Grawe, Secretary