

Upper Mississippi River Commission Notes

November 20, 2002

Upper Mississippi River Refuge Office
Winona, MN

Present: Bill Howe, John Campe, Robin Grawe, Marc Schultz, Kent Pehler, Minnesota State Senator Bob Kierlin (Winona) Eric Nelson (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), Trudy Balcom (Big River), Tim Breza (City of Winona), Mike Kennedy (Winona), Karrie Jackelen (Congressman Ron Kind's office), Cindy Samples (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).

The meeting was called to order at 10:02 AM by chair John Campe.

Moved by Kent, seconded by Robin to approve the agenda, with a friendly amendment to add Cindy Samples and Brian Aldrich to the agenda after Eric Nelson. Motion passed unanimously.

Comprehensive Conservation Plan: Eric Nelson of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge gave a presentation on the current status of the CCP and the comments received at public meetings, noting that the next step would be Saturday workshops where the USFWS would share their concerns and participants would brainstorm management alternatives, with a focus on closed areas, recreational use, and habitat needs.

Marc moved, Bill seconded the approval of the minutes of the last meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

River Cruise Celebrating Conservation: Cindy Samples of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge gave a presentation about a 2003 cruise on the American Queen steamboat celebrating conservation. Cindy said that many conservation activities were being planned with port cities and onboard displays and lectures. There was hope that President Bush or his wife would let loose a rehabilitated eagle.

Mississippi River Commission: Kent reported that the MRC Commissioner from New Madrid, Missouri had been reappointed to the MRC. **Moved by Bill, seconded by John that the Commission meet with the states' Congressional and Senate aides to get an early start on the next open seat on the Commission and the consider a Congressional amendment to the MRC to add a UMR representative to the MRC and to expand the criteria for selection of Commissioners as well as the scope of concerns of the MRC. Motion passed.**

State of the River Meetings: Robin reported on meeting with a planning group of five in Wabasha the previous day to solicit public concerns to be addressed at a spring meeting. Concerns included a Pool 5 drawdown, Reick's Lake, help in communicating with Washington, dredging in lower Pool 4, and possible slow/no-wake zones in backwaters to protect habitat. It was noted that slow/no-wake zones would draw a large crowd and likely generate contention. The possibility of addressing slow/no-wake zones at a separate meeting was considered.

Pool 5 Drawdown: Robin reported that a Pool 5 drawdown, though not approved by the Waterlevel Task Force (scheduled to meet next month), was emerging as the strongest contender for the next major pool-wide drawdown. She noted that opposition seems to be focused among Buffalo City summer residents, and that funding for dredging, both for channel maintenance and recreational use, needed to be resolved. She suggested that the MRCC might be able to help by

encouraging Congress and the Corps to find ways to make funds available or to seek other funding sources. Marc suggested that recreational dredging would best be handled as a local project. Mike Kennedy said that the dredging requirements for Pool 5 had been overstated. Gretchen Benjamin reported that two minimal drawdowns with minimal disruption were being considered for next summer, 9" in Pool 6 and 12" in Pool 9.

Grand Excursion: Bill reported on plans for the Grad Excursion of 2004. Tim Breza, Winona City Councilman, reported on Winona plans, noting particularly Winona's partnering efforts with Rochester and a role for Agahming park. He also reported that contracts had been let for upper deck work on the Wagon Bridge but that a funding mechanism to address pier scouring was still lacking. Bill reported that the Quad Cities was trying to arrange for two trains to travel to the Twin Cities running parallel to the flotilla, and that bikers were planning their own trips. Discussion noted that the very large number of groups intending to participate by boat, train, bicycle, or otherwise was likely to put extraordinary strain of restaurant and lodging facilities. Bill noted that the national media attention created by the flotilla would create a lifetime opportunity for side stories. Mike Kennedy remarked that the Upper Mississippi was seen as a safe post 9/11 vacation destination.

DNR Reports: Gretchen Benjamin of the Wisconsin DNR reported on large expected cuts in a state services, noting that chronic wasting disease testing was an additional expense. She also noted that Terry Moe was scheduled to retire January 13, and that the position would be held open at least 6 months.

Corps of Engineers and EMP: Robin reported that on November 21, a meeting on Lock and Dam 3 was to be held to consider alternatives for addressing the outdraught and embankment problems, noting that fish passages were included in the plans. Gretchen noted that since lock 19 had a 40' head, it formed a natural barrier to exotics and thus a fish passage at Lock 3 was not considered especially dangerous with respect to exotics. Bill noted that some consideration was being given to acquire the Gattenbein properties over time, with the current owners holding a life estate and management assistance being provided by the agencies. Gretchen stated that the agencies would work only with willing sellers and would not pressure anyone to sell unwillingly.

Robin reported that the co-chairs of the UMR Congressional Task Force had circulated to three Task Force members a letter to the Office of Budget and Management asking for full funding for the EMP in FY 2004. She said she had circulated this letter to the mailing list so that others could also write to OMB and recommended that the MRCC as part of its current EMP letter campaign write to OMB. Marc reported that a Nov. 19 meeting of representatives of the Izaak Walton League and the Environmental Defense Fund with area citizens had focused on the EMP.

By consensus it was decided not to meet in December and to meet next on January 14 in the Weiser Professional Building, La Crescent and invite Congressional and Senate aides to come to discuss MRC representation and EMP funding.

The meeting adjourned at 12:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin Grawe, Secretary