

Upper Mississippi River Commission Notes

February 18, 2003

Weiser Professional Building

La Crescent MN

Present: Bill Howe, Robin Grawe, Marc Schultz, Kent Pehler, John Wetzel, Bill Burke of Lansing Iowa, Don Hultman of the USFWS, Dan McGuinness and Jon Stravers of the Audubon Society.

The meeting was called to order at 10:06 PM by Vice-chair Bill Howe.

Hearing no requests for corrections, additions, or modifications, the chair approved the agenda.

Moved by John, seconded by Marc to approve the minutes of the last meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

Report from Dan McGuinness of the Audubon Society's Mississippi River

Campaign: Dan introduced Jon Stravers, an Audubon research and field coordinator and announced that Bonnie Koop had opened a small birding trail office next to the UW LaCrosse campus and had engaged a student intern. The Mississippi River Campaign, he said, had merged its office with that of Audubon, Minnesota, now has staff in three states and operates down to Cairo, IL

Dan listed four objectives of the campaign:

1. To inform people of the significance of the river and its watershed through
 - a. The Audubon Arc (they are in the process of buying the Lilly Belle and still hope to build a 149 passenger floating classroom)
 - b. The birding trails (ten maps are done, five to go)
 - c. Participation on other boat excursions such as the American Queen Conservation Cruise and the Julia Belle Swain
2. To take action to protect habitat, supporting the work of others in land acquisition and management
3. To work in the watershed—they have subcontracted with Wetlands Initiatives to hold water in upland areas
4. To influence public policy; Dan had met with B.G. Riley to encourage his support for the EMP and the Refuge as foundational for the habitat restoration component in the Navigation study. He also encouraged the Congressional establishment of a habitat restoration fund which could be supported by non-profit matches. He noted the question of cost of river restoration was raised.

Discussion followed: Marc noted that some of the costs of restoration are already being expended by local governments in development but they need to be channeled in the right way. Robin commented on the value of a fund which could use private dollars to make public projects work. Kent noted that the President's budget proposed to use moneys

from the Inland Waterways Trust Fund for O & M and environmental restoration rather than for navigation infrastructure as was originally intended. It was agreed that a habitat restoration trust fund would be distinct from the IWTF. Bill Burke noted the value of local knowledge and organization in habitat restoration. Bill Howe noted the need for mapping of the tributaries. Marc noted that through the federal fuel tax, recreation users were being taxed, but that these dollars were not currently being used to enhance recreation.

Commissioner and Participant Reports:

Kent reiterated concern from the navigation industry that the President's budget proposed to use money in the Inland Waterways Trust Fund to cost share operation and maintenance on navigable rivers. He noted that already 4 cents of the 24.7 cent per gallon fuel tax was designated for budget deficit reduction, making the IWTF the only trust fund paying down the deficit.

Bill Burke commented that improved beaches generate local citizen support for Mississippi River programs. He noted that the Pool 9 plans had been on the books for a decade but not implemented.

Bill Howe asked that Gretchen Benjamin be requested at our next meeting to give an update on Pools 9-10 Beach Plans.

Robin commented that from her work with Boundary Area Commission on beach plan meetings, it was her impression that the agencies wanted highly specific input from recreational users, while users were eager for ANY beach improvements. Recreational users also express dismay when they hear that dollars for beach improvement are scarce and yet they see Corps dredge spoil being hauled right passed beaches which could use improvement.

John Wetzel commented that boaters are getting off easy in that they are not asked to pay for river management services which maintain the recreational values of the river.

Marc Schultz presented an update on the proposed Mathy asphalt plant adjacent to Lake Onalaska and passed out hand-outs.

The next meeting was set for Marc 26, 10:00 AM in Winona. The Chair Howe asked that the group look at state budget cutbacks affecting the river.

State-of-the-River-Meeting Wabasha: Robin passed out a tentative agenda for the meeting, scheduled for Tuesday, March 25, 6:30 to 9:00 PM at the Wabasha City Hall. Marc agreed to make a presentation on the why's and how's of slow/no-wake in Wisconsin, and Robin agreed to do the same for Minnesota.

New Business:

Robin noted that she would be judging for the MRCC at the Winona District 861 Science Fair and at the Southeast Minnesota Regional Science Fair.

She also reported that the magazine *Big River* had increased dramatically in circulation recently and was considering new financial structures; she passed out a handout.

Don Hultman reported that the Service would be filling Keith Boeske's job as environmental engineer for the EMP and that the President's budget was good for the refuges.

Robin reported that she hoped to be in Washington in early June and as much as possible hoped to take a positive stance, but that she would not be positive about using IWTF moneys for other than already designated purposes.

Moved by John, seconded by Marc to write to the President thanking him for those parts of the budget that funded river programs well. Motion passed. Robin noted that MRCC affiliate Jim Sieben had written to the President thanking him for full funding of the EMP.

Chair Howe invited Bill Burke to apply for Commission membership by submitting a letter of recommendation from an elected official.

The meeting adjourned at 12:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin Grawe, Secretary