



Inland Waterways

Overview

The country's inland navigation system plays a critical role in the nation's economy, moving more than a billion tons of domestic commerce valued at more than \$300 billion per year. More than one billion bushels of grain (about 60 percent of all grain exports) move to export markets via the inland waterways each year.

Inland waterways relieve congestion on already over-crowded highways and railways that run through cities. One jumbo barge has the same capacity as 58 trucks or 15 rail cars. A typical 15-barge tow on our nation's rivers is equal to 870 semi trucks. Barges operate at 10 percent of the cost of trucks and 40 percent of the cost of trains while burning 10 times less high-price fuel.

There are also significant environmental benefits to the inland waterway system. The backwaters created by the lock and dam system support more than 40 percent of the migratory water fowl and fish breeding grounds and are home to more than 500 miles of wildlife refuge. In addition, more than \$1 billion are generated each year in recreational use – fishing, hunting and tourism.

Background

Investment in the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Waterways has not kept pace with the needs of the transportation sector. The lock system is approaching 80 years old and cannot accommodate modern barging practices that use 1,100 foot barge-tows. Many of the locks are only 600 feet long, forcing barges to use the time-consuming and dangerous double-locking procedure. The locks are outdated and deteriorating.

Corn growers have been long-time advocates for improvements to the inland waterway system. NCGA applauds the passage of the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 (WRDA). The legislation is much needed and long overdue. WRDA 2007 provides authorization for construction of seven locks on the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers as well as immediate implementation of small-scale measures and the creation of a major ecosystem restoration program. These lock upgrades would require a total of 48,000,000 person hours from skilled trades throughout the Midwest.

NCGA has worked to secure pre-construction funding for the Upper Mississippi River System projects in anticipation of WRDA authorization. With the passage of WRDA, NCGA is focused on obtaining construction dollars through the annual appropriations process.

Action Needed

- Contact Members of Congress urging them to support funding to construct the locks and dams on the upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers.