Upper Mississippi River Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program

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The Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP) is a long-term program of navigation improvements and ecosystem restoration for the Upper Mississippi River System (UMRS).

The primary goals of the program are to increase the capacity and improve the reliability of the inland navigation system while restoring, protecting, and enhancing the environment through implementation of an integrated, dual-purpose plan to ensure the economic and environmental sustainability of the Upper Mississippi River System.

Transportation, boating, fishing, and myriad other business and recreational uses of the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway (UMR-IWW) provide approximately $1 billion dollars annually in net benefits to the nation's economy. Equally important is the high environmental value these rivers provide the nation. Balancing these combined, and sometimes conflicting, factors make managing the river system challenging, with many individuals and organizations championing great and varying interests.

In view of these considerations, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers conducted the Upper Mississippi River - Illinois Waterway System Navigation Feasibility Study to determine the best way to manage the UMRS in a manner which balances economic, environmental, social, and political needs. This study took a systems approach since changes in one part of the system may have an impact elsewhere in the system.

Under the study, the Rock Island District, St. Louis District and St. Paul District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers investigated the feasibility of navigation improvements to eight locks and 348 miles of the Illinois Waterway and 29 locks and 854 miles of the Upper Mississippi River. The feasibility of ecosystem enhancement and restoration on both rivers was also investigated.

The study determined the location and appropriate sequencing of any needed navigation improvements and ecosystem projects on the two rivers and prioritized these capital investments for the first half of the next century. The study also included a system-wide environmental assessment leading to the completion of a system Environmental Impact Statement.

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