

Wisconsin Conservation Congress Mississippi River Committee Minutes

The regular meeting of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress Mississippi River Committee was held on **August 28, 2009** at the Radisson Hotel of LaCrosse Wisconsin.

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM by Chairman Marc Schultz; roll was called.

Committee members present included: Marc Schultz, Wes Domine, Tom Buckner, Byron Clements, Gary Dillaber, Mike Hayes, William Howe, Dick Jesseski, Rick Knutson, Ken Snow, and Wayne Stietz

Committee Members absent Included: Ralph Kunkel, Matt Sedelbauer, and Steve Sievwright. Ralph Kunkel and Matt Sedelbauer were excused.

Other Conservation Congress members present included Chairman Ed Harvey and DNR Liaison Kurt Thiede.

DNR Staff Present included Fisheries Team Supervisor Ron Benjamin and Conservation Warden Bob Jumbeck.

Others members of the public present included Mark Gaikowski of the USGS.

ORDER OF BUSINESS –

Review of Mission Statement for the Mississippi River Committee:

The mission statement adopted by the MRC in 2008 was read. There was no discussion or call to amend the current mission statement.

Mission Statement of the Mississippi River Committee (MRC) of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress:

Within and to the support of Wisconsin Conservation Congress process; it is the mission of the Mississippi River Committee to advise the Wisconsin NRB on issues, rules, or policies which affect the river and/or other associated natural resources.

The MRC strives to stay acquainted with current river resource management; the science in support or opposition to that management; and with public opinion thereof. The MRC encourages river management agencies to seek public participation in management decisions or policy. Influence stemming from the MRC shall be generated with greatest intentions toward long term benefits to all wildlife resources; and with an emphasis toward preserving public access and harvest of game resources, (i.e., preserving outdoor heritage activities of hunting, fishing, and trapping).

Informational – CC Chairman Ed Harvey commented that past chairmen have not attended a MRC meeting for some time, and that attendance by the chairman was overdue. He was pleased to be able to attend this meeting, along with Kurt Thiede.

Invasive Species Update

Mark Gaikowski of the USGS shared insight on proposed projects of the USGS. These included enzyme and bacterial studies aimed at control of zebra and quagga Mussels and invasive carp. Study funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative had passed the US Senate and House, but currently at different levels which will have to be adjusted. Mark reported that Iowa State has also been studying methods to possibly control invasive bighead and silver carp.

Update on EMP & NESP

The Corps of Engineers administered *Environmental Management Program*, (EMP) is intended to ensure development and enhancement of the Upper Mississippi River system, with primary emphasis on habitat enhancement projects. The *Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program*, (NESP) is a long-term program of navigation improvements and ecological restoration to ensure the economic and environmental sustainability of the UMRS.

Ron Benjamin provided a list of EMP project costs from within the St Paul District.

Ken Snow commented that the proposed Pierce County Islands project is very much needed, as the area's fish habitat is very poor.

Wes Domine commented that forest management on the UMWR should include some provision for habitat loss prevention. Specifically, complete up-rooting of trees from which huge chunks of bank are permanently lost, could be prevented if "shoreline leaners" could be cut when they become close to the point uprooting. Cutting of shoreline leaner trees would not only keep bank-holding tree roots in place, but would also allow sunlight to rejuvenate soil holding grasses and sedges.

Stimulus fund projects directly related to the Mississippi River

Discussion comments were shared relating to existence of stimulus funds.

Proposed questions for 2010 spring hearing

Wes Domine presented a written question relating to harvest and use of bait on the Mississippi River, (attached). Motion by was made by Wes to forward the question to the Executive Council of the Conservation Congress for inclusion at Spring CC Hearings, motion 2nd by Mike Hayes. Following discussion, motion passed unanimously.

Invasive Species Control

Mark Schultz presented information emphasizing the need to be proactive in the prevention and control of invasive species. Mark suggested that because the WCC provides an important communication link between local conservation organizations, the WDNR, and the public; the WCC can be utilized to create collaboration in fighting invasive species.

FEMA Flood Elevations

Bill Howe shared that FEMA has changed flood level elevations to a level two feet above the 1965 flood. Bill suggested members check with their county zoning departments to verify they are aware and acting in accordance with new flood levels.

Hydropower applications for Locks and Dams

Ron Benjamin shared comments about Hydro-kinetic Technology. This technology shows some promise for being able to produce electricity from generating equipment placed in river currents. On the Mississippi, many license applications for placement of such equipment have been filed by non-profit and non-government organizations. Ron expressed that we don't know enough about the equipment to know if it is harmful to fish or the river ecosystem.

Update on USACE natural resource projects and Land Use Allocation Plan

Marc Schultz reported that the USACE and USFWS have conducted a new zoning of river lands. The agencies will be accepting public comments on the plan through September 3, 2009. Maps are available for reviewing new zoning assignments. Motion was made by Bill Howe to ask the WDNR to formally request from the USACE and USFWS, a 45 day extension to the comment period; 2nd by Dick Jesseski. Motion passed unanimously.

Commercial Navigation Locking Fees

Marc Schultz reported that according to the LaCrosse Harbor Commission, there is new support for charging commercial traffic (barges) a fee for using locks. Such lock fees could place the Upper Mississippi at an economic disadvantage as it would raise shipping rates for river business. Concern was also expressed over the possibility of future recreational locking fees.

Member Matters

Ken Snow shared concerns about net marking flags used by commercial fishermen on Lake Pepin. White colored flags are often very hard to see, and boat motors too often become entangled in these nets. Ron Benjamin and Bob Jumbeck suggested the concerns are shared by the commercial fishermen, since they dislike damaged nets. The difficulty of seeing white flags could be easily relayed to the commercial fishing organizations.

Committee members were invited to tour the EMP project near Brownsville MN beginning at 8:30 Saturday morning. Boat transportation and information updates for the tour were complements of WDNR, via Ron Benjamin.

Motion to adjourn by Wayne Stietz, 2nd by Gary Dillaber. Meeting was adjourned at 10:10 PM

Respectfully Submitted, Wes Domine – Secretary