

ber 2004, under the title “The Ohio River Navigation System Investment Plan.” According to the Corps, “The report will prioritize the recommended Ohio River modernization improvements using four prediction scenarios through the year 2060. It will include a system-wide Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement with the Engineering, Economics, and Environmental Cumulative Effects Assessments.”

In fact, it is self-evident that many aged Ohio corridor installations should be modernized. For example, the Emsworth Lock and Dam No. 1 just downriver from Pittsburgh was built in 1920. Its chamber of 56 by 360 feet should be replaced, recommends the Corps, by a new 110 by 600 foot chamber.

The Ohio River Mainstem group stated this on current construction in March 2003: Olmsted and McAlpine Locks and Dams were previously studied and authorized, and are now under construction. Olmsted, a new project on the Ohio River, will replace the last two historic wicket-style dams built in the early 1920s. Twin 110’ by 1,200’ chambers and a five tainter-gate dam with a navigation pass will be operating by 2008. McAlpine construction replaces the 110’ by 600’ and 110’ by 360’ auxiliary locks, with a 110’ by 1,200’ lock; and existing swing and drawbridges with a fixed bridge spanning the new and existing 1,200’ locks. As with all navigation construction projects, both are cost-shared with the Inland Waterways Trust Fund.”

Decrepit U.S. Dams Are ‘A Recipe for Disaster’

by Mary Jane Freeman

Kentucky’s dam woes are not limited to the Ohio River network. On Aug. 5, the Kentucky *Herald-Leader* reported that the abutment wall to Lock and Dam 3 on the Kentucky River collapsed. The Kentucky River Authority plans a \$200,000 emergency fix. Spring floods are blamed for the wall’s wash-out, but the dam’s age cannot be discounted as a factor. It is a timber structure filled with rocks and covered with concrete, built in 1842 and refurbished in 1882! If it fails, it will threaten Lock and Dam 4, which holds the water supply of the capital city, Frankfort.

There are 14 locks and dams on the Kentucky River, most of which were first built in the early 1900s. About 710,000 people live in the Kentucky River Basin and depend on it as their water source. Funding for renovation and rehabilitation is nearly at a standstill, making a disaster waiting to happen.

Over 78,000 dams comprise the backbone of America’s water infrastructure. Only a fraction of these are run by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Dams facilitate billions of dollars of commerce to flow from, and into, the country; provide flood control; and supply water for drinking, crop irrigation, industrial use, hydroelectric power, and recreation. But budget cuts on the Federal, state, and local level, combined with the obsolescence of sections of this vital infrastructure, put more and more of the network at risk.

Were the United States to launch a “Super-TVA” type project and re-establish itself as a producer nation, as *EIR* founding editor and economist Lyndon LaRouche has called for, portions of this network would collapse under the stress of increased use.

Non-Army Corps-controlled dams make up the bulk of dams which are run by local and state governments or private interests. Over 58% of all dams are privately owned. Private owners rarely have the means to maintain or rehabilitate these structures—many of which are at or past their 50-year life span. Costs have increased due to: a) the aging process, now requiring substantial renovation in many cases; b) population growth and development downstream in former rural areas; and c) new safety regulations. States and local governments hit with collapsed tax revenues and cuts in Federal aid, often put off making such expenditures, ultimately costing more in lost revenues, damage to property, and loss of life.

Bush’s Deep Cuts Create Risk

The American Society of Civil Engineers’ 2003 Progress Report, “Report Card for America’s Infrastructure,” reported

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America has 85-90,000 dams in its official inventory. There are the large mainstream—usually “downstream”—dams on major rivers which are almost all the responsibility of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, such as the Willow Island Lock and Dam on the Ohio in West Virginia (left). On upstream sites, some 11,000 smaller—“watershed”—dams have been built through the partnership between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and local watershed project sponsors. Shown is a small dam and lake in Tama County, Iowa, with terraces, grass plantings, buffer strips, and other conservation measures.

that the number of “unsafe” dams increased 23% just from 2001-03, to nearly 2,600 dams. It graded America’s dams “D,” or poor. ASCE estimated that \$10.1 billion over 12 years was needed to improve or overhaul all critical non-Federal dams that pose a risk to human life should they fail. But the Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO) task force of specialists found that if all U.S. non-Federal dams in need of repairs were upgraded or repaired, the cost would exceed \$36 billion. Dam safety has become a critical issue. ASDSO recognized that financial constraints make dam owners delay maintenance and repairs. “The dangerous combination of aging, neglected dams and rapid downstream population growth is a recipe for disaster,” it argued. Yet funding programs for dam repairs exist in fewer than 12 states. Without strong state support or a national dam rehabilitation loan program, “disastrous dam failures are inevitable.”

The National Watershed Coalition (NWC) adds to these estimates another \$2 billion—\$564 million to rehabilitate 880 dams, and \$1.5 billion for 1,862 unfunded but approved projects.

Fifty years ago this month, President Eisenhower signed Public Law 534, creating a national watershed program which has built 11,000 flood-control dams in 2,000 watersheds across the nation at a cost of \$2 billion, benefitting 62 million people. A follow-on public law, PL 566, was funded at a \$250 million level in the 1970s and 1980s. The funds are part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service budget.

The Bush Administration cut the watershed budget to \$107 million in 2002, to \$87 million in 2004, and proposed \$40 million for the 2005 budget. Congress balked, and restored some of the funds to the 2005 budget, appropriating

nearly \$100 million. While better than Bush’s plan, it is still a far cry from what is needed. An important note: For every dollar invested in these programs, \$2.20 is returned in money saved by flood prevention.

Every state except Alaska has hundreds of dams. Failure to spend money for repairs or upgrades has already cost communities greatly.

- Mississippi: In March 2004 the Big Bay Lake dam in Lamar County burst, sending 7 billion gallons of water downstream. The earthen dam was 57 feet high and held a 900 acre lake behind it. The flood waters demolished 104 homes and businesses.

- New Jersey: After heavy rains in July, 18 dams failed in Burlington County, unleashing their lakes downstream, and sending 800 residents from their homes. More than \$50 million in damages occurred; 26 other dams were damaged; and a Federal disaster zone was declared. Many of the burst dams were overdue for inspection and repair. Statewide, 1,600 dams date back to the early to mid-1900s.

- Pennsylvania: Federal funds are needed to improve the antiquated locks and dams along the Monongahela River, which passes through Pittsburgh, transporting such vital goods as coal, steel, and grain. Funds have only trickled in for approved projects; the entire river rehabilitation was to be done by 2004, but is now projected for 2019! If a dam near Pittsburgh were to fail? One example: A tow pulling six coal-filled barges would need its coal load transferred to 275 trucks.

Combined, these organizations put the price tag to upgrade our dam infrastructure at \$40-45 billion over five to ten years. *EIR*’s estimate, factoring in a return of the nation to its leadership in science and industry, is in the range of \$80-100 billion over the same time frame.