

More Emergency Repairs, Closures on Waterways

by Marcia Merry Baker

The mid-August shut-down of the McAlpine Locks at Louisville for emergency repairs, which rendered Ohio River shipping out-of-service for 10 days, is just the most dramatic of many such events now taking place on key parts of America's inland waterways, long overdue for overhaul. Many installations are over 70 years old, and Army Corps of Engineers care cannot make up for their structural fatigue. **Figure 1** maps the sites of some of the recent emergency repairs and threatened closures. For the repair to a cracked lock gate Aug. 19-21 at the Rock Island, Illinois dam on the Mississippi River, the Corps had to install its *last temporary gate available* on the Mississippi system!

Pending but stalled Congressional legislation would authorize a 50-year project by the Army Corps to modernize the 26 locks and dams of the Upper Mississippi/Illinois Rivers. (<http://www2.mvr.usace.army.mil/umr-iwwsns/>). Brig. Gen.

Don T. Riley, Commander of the Corps' Mississippi Valley Division, spoke of the "ever-aging river navigation system" in May when the Corps' plans were released, commenting that the proposed improvements—including to riparian ecology—would "ensure these rivers remain a national treasure for generations to come."

Lyndon LaRouche, who backs a build-up of the Army Corps itself, is leading a national mobilization not only for this urgent rivers project, but for an emergency "Super-TVA" approach to national infrastructure building (rail, aviation, water supplies, land reclamation, urban utilities systems, health care, nuclear power), as the only realistic response to the economic breakdown process.

There are bi-partisan sponsors among Mississippi Basin Senators for the Upper Mississippi/Illinois project (S. 2470), including Kit Bond (R) and Jim Talent (R) from Missouri; Richard Durbin (D) and Peter Fitzgerald (R) of Illinois; Mark Dayton (D) and Norm Coleman (R) of Minnesota; Tom Harkin (D) and Charles Grassley (R) from Iowa; and Mark Pryor (D) of Arkansas. Over August, Durbin stumped for the Army Corps projects in Illinois. At the local level, it's a "no contest" issue almost anyplace on the waterways. For example, in Louisville's 3rd C.D. Democratic contender Tony Miller backs Army Corps funding; incumbent Anne Northup (R) also supports her "local" McAlpine Locks project, though otherwise an ideological neo-con who opposes the very principle of infrastructure.

This only illustrates the political point that while almost no one but Tom DeLay favors floods, shutting down navigation, throwing people out of work, etc., the crucial leadership issue—for both parties—is: Who will mobilize the public to think and vote like citizens again? This is the purpose of LaRouche's *Real Democratic Party Platform* and the LaRouche Youth Movement. Louisville is one of the key locations where the youth have been organizing through town meetings, walking tours, and rallies.

'Fatigue Failures'/ Emergency Repairs

The map shows five sites of recent emergency repairs on the locks and dams of the Upper Mississippi/Ohio River systems.

Louisville, Kentucky: On

FIGURE 1





The crane “Quad Cities” here lowers into position a temporary gate, in the lower gates of the main chamber at Lock and Dam 15, on the Mississippi River, in Rock Island, Illinois, to replace a cracked structure removed for repairs off-site. This is the last temporary gate the Army Corps of Engineers has available for emergency use on the Mississippi.

Aug. 19, the Army Corps reopened the McAlpine Locks after gate repairs were finished three days in advance of its Aug. 22 deadline. Seventeen barge tows began to move again. On Aug. 9, the Corps had shut the lock in order to repair metal-fatigue cracks in the main gate of the 1,200-foot-long chamber, found by diver-inspectors in May. There is no redundancy of locks at Louisville, nor at some other key lock installations on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, because replacement and modernization have been delayed for many years, under “fiscal restraint” Federal policy. At present, the Corps is replacing McAlpine’s two old 600-foot auxiliary locks with a new 1,200-foot-long chamber, to provide twin modern passageways—a construction job that should have been done 15 years ago, when the existing 1,200-foot lock was only 25 years old, and not subject to metal fatigue. All the Corps can do now, is schedule frequent diver-inspections, and hope not to find more structural breakdowns.

Lock and Dam 15, Rock Island: At this Mississippi River site at Quad Cities (northern-most box symbol on the map), the Army Corps had to install its last spare set of gates for the Mississippi, during the August emergency repair work, shutting down the entire flow of Mississippi River barge traffic. Corps inspectors found large cracks along the bottom of two of its massive gates—with the metal cracked all the way through. “It’s something that you’re going to see more and more of as time goes on,” asserted Bill Gretten, the operations manager for the Corps on the Mississippi River. “The locks are 70 years old. They were designed to last 50. It’s a fatigue failure.”

These emergency repairs to the main chamber at Lock and Dam 15, which spans the Mississippi River between Davenport, Iowa and Rock Island, Illinois, are not the only problem. The auxiliary lock has been shut down since last Summer, due to cracks, rust, and damage to two of its gates. In addition, locks 19, 22 and 27 downstream have undergone significant repair work. As a result, a Corps spokesman acknowledged that another lock breakdown would cause traffic to a halt along the entire Mississippi.

Lock 27: Repairs started July 26 at the 51-year-old Chain of Rocks Canal on Lock 27 (southernmost box symbol on Figure 1), after bolts, that help the lock gate swing open and shut, began breaking off. The main 1,200-foot chamber has now had its upper gate bolts replaced; and the Corps intends to replace the lower gates in the near future. During the recent closure, barge

tows were broken down and moved through a smaller, 600-foot chamber. Through this Mississippi system of locks passes 60% of U.S. grain exports.

The decades-long lack of funding for the Corps, preventing timely replacements and upgrades, is now so bad that simple “M&O”—maintenance and operation—cannot take place, and it faces shutting down structures outright. A few threatened sites are shown on the map.

Kaskaskia: On this tributary of the Mississippi, in southern Illinois, the lock may have to be closed permanently, and even the dam revert to “no-staff” at-a-distance electronic monitoring.

Oachita/Black River: The four locks and dams on this channel—two in Arkansas, and two in Louisiana—feeding into the Lower Mississippi River, were threatened with shut-down as of Oct. 1, because the proposed Cheney/Bush FY2005 budget contained only \$2 million a year, instead of the minimum \$10 million required; then in May, the White House announced an emergency reprieve, promising another \$8 million. A hue and cry had been organized by Democratic Party state legislators and Congressmen. But there is no certainty.

Willamette River: This flows into the Columbia at Portland, Oregon. A closure is planned Oct. 1 by the Corps of Engineers, for the Willamette Falls locks and dam in Oregon City, due to *zero Federal funding for FY2005*. Losing these locks, operated by the Corps since 1915, will be a huge blow to residents and businesses in cities such as Eugene, Salem, and Portland.

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