

Report Finds Corps of Engineers Inflated River Traffic Data In Attempt to Justify Ohio River Lock Expansion

Conservation Groups Call for Independent Review

Cincinnati, OH (April 11) A report commissioned by the Ohio River Foundation and endorsed by the National Wildlife Federation charges the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) with using faulty river traffic estimates to justify expensive and environmentally damaging lock expansion on the Ohio River. The Corps is set to release a study proposing to spend an additional \$2 billion on expanding more Ohio River locks.

“It is astonishing that even in the face of increasing budget deficits, stagnating river traffic growth, and minimal support from the Bush administration that the Corps continues to recommend building these lock structures,” says Rich Cogen, Executive Director of the Ohio River Foundation. “This is a case of the Corps proposing to double the size of auxiliary locks at a cost of more than \$350 million. Congress should immediately order an independent review of these projects.”

The Corps has received Congressional authorization to extend the 600-foot auxiliary locks at the J.T. Myers Locks and Dam near Evansville, IN, and the Greenup Locks and Dam 40 miles downriver of Huntington, WV, into two 1,200-foot locks, at a cost of \$181 million and \$175.5 million, respectively.

“This is one more example of the Corps failing to justify a completely unnecessary project,” says Tim Eder, Director of the National Wildlife Federation Corps Reform Campaign. “This reinforces the importance of Congress reining in an agency that routinely promotes projects that are environmentally damaging and waste of taxpayer dollars.”

As justification for lock expansion, the Corps forecasts significant increases in barge traffic. To investigate these claims, the Ohio River Foundation commissioned renowned transportation expert Dr. Phillip Baumel, *emeritus* professor at Iowa State University, to evaluate the Corps’ work. Baumel’s review reveals that the traffic estimates used by the Corps inflate expected river traffic beyond all reasonable expectations.

The study compared Corps estimates with actual river barge traffic to assess the accuracy of Corps forecasting formulas. It found that between 1990 and 2004, traffic increased by about 0.4 percent per year; however, the Corps estimated actual traffic to increase by 10.6 percent per year, resulting in a 360 million ton overestimation of Ohio River system traffic growth. Corps estimates have not taken into account an apparent

major slowdown in Ohio River traffic growth. Moreover, total annual barge traffic on the J.T. Myers Locks and Dam actually declined 12.5 million tons from 1990 to 2004, compared to a Corps forecast of growth from 83.5 million tons to 111.6 million tons. During this 14-year period, the Corps overestimated the J.T. Myers annual traffic by a cumulative total of 330.6 million tons.

The Corps overestimated total traffic on the J.T. Myers Locks and Dams because it didn't take into account falling coal traffic. Trends in coal production, coal exports, and electricity grid transactions suggest that coal traffic on the Ohio River system is unlikely to increase any time soon. Additionally, the Corps neglects to consider the impact and availability of rail, trucks and other forms of transportation.

“The huge gap between projected and actual coal traffic gives Congress the opportunity to insist that the flaws in the Corps' studies be corrected before making funding decisions,” says report author Baumel.

In another example, the Corps overestimated traffic on the Gallipolis Locks and Dam (now called the Robert C. Byrd Locks and Dam), 60 miles upriver from Huntington, WV, between 1980 and 2001. Estimates were used to justify and authorize construction of that lock expansion project in 1986. It was built to handle 95 million tons per year but maximum traffic has not exceeded 59 million tons, and is on a downward trend since 1996. Furthermore, the Corps asked for and received approval for the project at a cost of \$305 million, yet total costs now exceed \$380 million.

Congress is considering legislation that will force the Corps to set priorities on the projects that will produce the greatest return on taxpayer's investment and to use the best science and the best economic tools to ensure projects are environmentally and fiscally sound.

The report is available at www.nwf.org/news and www.ohioriverfdn.org

Ohio River Foundation is focused on protecting and improving the ecology of the Ohio River for the benefit of communities and future generations. The Foundation offers conservation and education programs, including its River Explorer program that reaches thousands of students each year. Visit www.ohioriverfdn.org

National Wildlife Federation is America's conservation organization protecting wildlife for our children's future. Visit www.nwf.org.

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