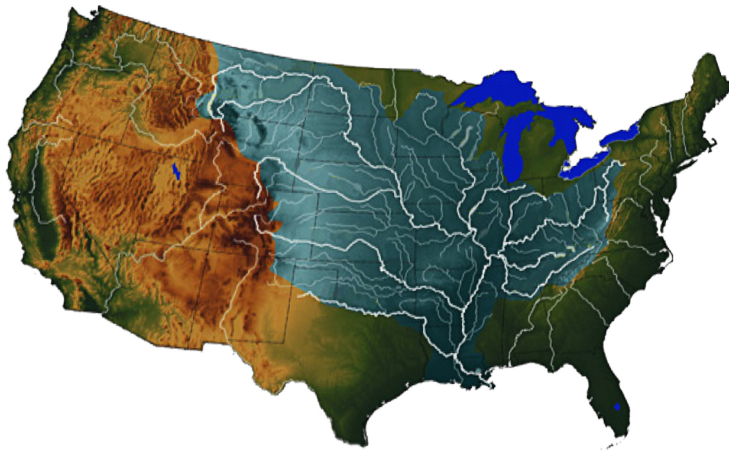


# BIG RIVER COALITION



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March 12, 2021

## **WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT of 2020 Section 106 Coast Guard Anchorages**

Lt General Scott A. Spellmon  
Chief of Engineers  
US Army Corps of Engineers, HQ  
441 G St. NW (GAO)  
Washington DC, 20314-1000

Dear Lt. General Spellmon,

Please accept this request from the Big River Coalition in regard to suggested and needed responses to maintain safe and reliable commercial navigation on the Mississippi River Ship Channel specific to Section 106 of the Water Resources Development Act of 2020.

The Big River Coalition (BRC) is committed to “Advocating for a Mightier Mississippi River” to ensure the future of unimpeded navigation on the Mississippi River Ship Channel (MRSC) as one of the nation’s fundamental natural resources and a true economic superhighway. The Coalition is committed to protecting maritime commerce across the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MRT) while focusing on maximizing transportation efficiencies on the Mississippi River Ship Channel from Baton Rouge to the Gulf of Mexico. The Mississippi River and Tributaries project has an estimated \$ 735.7 billion annual impact on the nation’s economy and is responsible for approximately 2.4 million jobs (585,000 jobs on the Lower River – Cairo, IL to the Gulf of Mexico and 1.86 million plus jobs on the Upper River-Lake Itasca, MN to Cairo, IL and including the IL River). As the future of the MRT is shaped, it is imperative that navigation representatives strive to ensure that systematic approaches protect maritime trade by maintaining fully authorized channel dimensions, while also updating and maintaining our navigation infrastructure, specifically the locks and dams of the MRT system. The Big River Coalition missions are focused on securing increased funding from the Harbor Maintenance Tax and the Inland Users Fuel Tax, efforts to deepen the Mississippi River Ship Channel to 50 feet and to increase the beneficial use of dredged material or “Sediment Recycling.”

The BRC has advocated over the last decade for increased Congressional Appropriations for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to maintain commerce on the Mississippi River Ship Channel (MRSC). The USACE is in the process of deepening the MRSC to 50 feet and there are critical authorized deep-draft anchorages on the Ship Channel that are deficient and these deficiencies will be increased when the channel is deepened. Channel maintenance on these deficient anchorages is a critical component of the channel deepening project and for navigational safety. The Ship Channel deepening will bring vessels with deeper drafts into this critical artery of trade and the need for channel maintenance specific to channel surveys and dredging in deep-draft anchorages is

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a very important step to prepare the Ship Channel for post-Panamax trade. The Coalition has repeatedly been informed that the USACE does not have the authority to perform channel maintenance in anchorages on the MRSC because they are not “project features” and fall outside of the Ship Channel.

The BRC reaction after reviewing the language reproduced below in Section 106 of the Water Resources Development Act of 2020 was to formulate this prioritized list. The Coalition requests that the USACE consider channel maintenance on the three deep-draft anchorages as prioritized below. The list was vetted by the Big River Coalition’s Board of Directors which includes members of the four Pilot Associations that are responsible to protect navigation on the Mississippi River Ship Channel. The text for Section 106 is reproduced below:

## SEC. 106. COAST GUARD ANCHORAGES:

The Secretary may perform dredging at Federal expense within and adjacent to anchorages established by the Coast Guard pursuant to existing authorities.

The Big River Coalition has developed this prioritized list based on concern about the impact of shoaling in the three deep-draft anchorages identified below.

- 1) **Pilottown Anchorage.** An area 5.2 miles in length along the right descending bank of the river from mile 1.5 to mile 6.7 above Head of Passes, extending in width to 1600 feet from the left descending bank of the river.

The Pilottown Anchorage is priority number one and has severely shoaled in since the creation of the West Bay Diversion at Mile 4.7 Above Head of Passes on the right descending bank (western side). The West Bay Diversion was constructed and the Cost-Share Agreement between the State of Louisiana and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers included an agreement to maintain the Pilottown Anchorage at historic levels as detailed below:

“Included as a Project feature is the maintenance of the outermost (eastern) 250-foot wide strip of the Pilottown Anchorage area and the entire width of the adjoining access area between this strip of the Pilottown Anchorage area and the Mississippi River navigation channel. Advanced maintenance of the Pilottown anchorage area shall be undertaken to account for the anticipated shoaling induced by the Project. Below the conveyance channel, the anchorage and access areas shall be maintained at the depths existing at the time the Phase One interim conveyance channel is constructed. Above the cut, three 45-foot deep by 1,500 feet long anchorage berths shall be constructed and/or maintained. Since there are no direct navigational conflicts associated with dredging in the Anchorage Basin or access area, material from this area will be hydraulically dredged and beneficially place in the West Bay outfall area.”

The Coalition is aware that this agreement was changed after the construction of the diversion, but prior to the construction of the project it was widely accepted that the diversion would increase shoaling in the immediate area downstream of the diversion structure and within the Pilottown Anchorage. The Coalition’s top priority is to restore the limits of the anchorage identified in the executed Cost-Share Agreement:

“Above the cut, three 45-foot deep by 1,500 feet long anchorage berths shall be constructed and/or maintained.”

The Coalition’s top priority request is to begin with restoring the three 1,500 anchorage berths above the West Bay Diversion to an increased depth of 50 feet to match the new Federally authorized channel dimensions of the deepened Ship Channel. The Pilottown Anchorage is critical for multiple reasons, geographically it is the southernmost anchorage available on the Ship Channel. It is the only emergency anchorage available for the Associated Branch Pilots to anchor vessels caught in bad weather, fog, or that experience engine malfunctions as they transit the critical reach of Southwest Pass.

The deep-draft anchorage is severely deficient, and, in some locations, shallow-draft fishing vessels have gone aground within the limits of this deep-draft anchorage. The Coalition would like to coordinate with the USACE

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to seek remedies through Section 106 to be applied to the Pilottown Anchorage as a top priority which remains an ongoing navigational safety concern.

The Coalition requests that the two deep-draft anchorages listed below be considered for channel condition surveys and dredged when needed to maintain the maximum draft of the Mississippi River Ship Channel. The Lower Grandview Anchorage has been deficient at times during low river stages and is often closed to vessel usage to promote navigational safety while the USACE is dredging on the Crossings Above New Orleans. The BRC works cooperatively with the USACE to promote navigational safety around dredging and revetment operations that are in close proximity to the Ship Channel. Typically, when dredging operations occur near the Lower Grandview Anchorage, the anchorage is closed to normal vessel usage to reduce risks to vessel traffic and the maintenance equipment.

- 2) **Lower Grandview Anchorage.** An area 0.3 miles in length along the left descending bank of the river extending from mile 146.4 to mile 146.7 above Head of Passes. The width of the anchorage is 500 feet. The inner boundary of the anchorage is a line parallel to the nearest bank 200 feet from the water's edge into the river as measured from the LWRP. The outer boundary of the anchorage is a line parallel to the nearest bank 700 feet from the water's edge into the river as measured for the LWRP.

The Belle Chasse Anchorage will become increasingly important due to expansion of a large post-Panamax container facility expected to be constructed in the immediate area over the next 3-5 years. This anchorage would be heavily utilized by the largest container vessels calling the Gulf of Mexico. Due to the location many of the largest container vessels will transit this area and not go into the upper portion of the Port of New Orleans that is limited by the air draft of the Crescent City Connection Bridges that crosses over the Mississippi River. The downriver span is at Mile 95.7 Above Head of Passes and is the southernmost bridge that crosses over the Mississippi River.

- 3) **Belle Chasse Anchorage.** An area 2.1 miles in length along the right descending bank of the river extending from mile 73.1 to mile 75.2 above Head of Passes. The width of the anchorage is 575 feet. The inner boundary of the anchorage is a line parallel to the nearest bank 425 feet from the water's edge into the river as measured from the LWRP. The outer boundary of the anchorage is a line parallel to the nearest bank 1,000 feet from the water's edge into the river as measured from the LWRP.

The Big River Coalition is excited to see the authority provided to the USACE to maintain deep-draft anchorages and is dedicated to pursuing channel maintenance on the Mississippi River Ship Channel. The deepening of the first phase of the Mississippi River will be completed over the next few months and Pilottown Anchorage should be considered as the primary target for maintenance, the deeper vessels will exasperate the need for hydrographic surveys of these anchorages. The Coalition looks forward to continuing this discussion with the USACE leadership and will participate in the upcoming WRDA 2020 Stakeholder Sessions.

Sincerely,  
*Sean M. Duffy, Sr.*

Sean M. Duffy, Sr.  
Executive Director

CC: Tiffany Burroughs, USACE Chief of Navigation  
Eddie Belk, USACE Director of Programs MVD