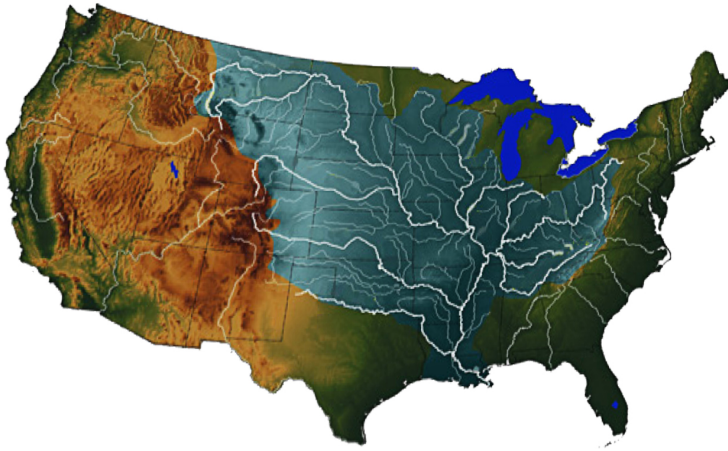


# BIG RIVER COALITION



Sean M. Duffy, Sr.  
Executive Director  
4741 Utica Street, Suite 200  
Metairie, LA 70006

Direct Line: (504) 338-3165  
Fax Number: (888) 254-4553

[sean.duffy@bigrivercoalition.org](mailto:sean.duffy@bigrivercoalition.org)

May 11, 2021

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

## **REGIONAL DREDGE DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM**

Dear Honorable Lt. General Spellmon,

The Big River Coalition (BRC) is committed to ensuring the future of navigation on the Mississippi River Ship Channel (MRSC) as one of the nation's fundamental natural resources and as a true economic generator. The Mississippi River has an annual economic impact of over \$ 735 billion on the nation's economy and is responsible for approximately 2.4 million jobs. A recent study by the American Association of Port Authorities found that ocean cargo activity accounts for approximately 26 percent of the U.S. economy, generating nearly \$5 trillion in total economic activity and more than \$321 billion in federal, state and local taxes. The BRC has prepared this update to document the tremendous progress generated by adjustments made possible by the Regional Dredge Demonstration Program (RDDP).

The Great Flood of 2019 shattered records for both the length and volume of flood waters over all previous historic floods. One metric for recording the volume of water is an "Acre Foot" of water which is equivalent to approximately 326,000 gallons. During the Flood of 2019 over 910,000 acre-feet of water were passed down the Mississippi River and Tributaries while previous record floods passed almost 200,000 acre-feet less, with the previous volume record occurring in 1973 with 725,000 acre-feet and in 1927 passing 700,000 acre-feet. The Great Flood of 2019 unfolded and triggered emergency responses across challenged communities along the Mississippi River Basin to deal with flooding related challenges. The navigation industry was also severely disrupted as the record flood waters deposited a record amount of sediment in Southwest Pass of the Mississippi River Ship Channel. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) was unable to secure a sufficient number of hopper dredges to respond to this emergency and the Ship Channel quickly became deficient. In order to maintain safe navigation, the ship pilots on the Mississippi River were forced to implement severe draft restrictions for all vessels transiting Southwest Pass, with the most severe draft restrictions five feet less than normal a reduction

# BIG RIVER COALITION

from 47 feet to 42 feet. Every foot of draft lost or gained equals approximately \$1 million in cargo value, a reduction of five feet means approximately \$5 million in cargo value is left behind.

The following statistic was prepared and released by the USACE during the battle to recover the Mississippi River Ship Channel in 2019:

"Preliminary estimates from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers indicate the extended high river and historic flood event impacted \$6-7B worth of cargo that would typically transit through the Mississippi River's Southwest Pass."

The Great Flood of 2019 also carried a record amount of sediment downriver, in order to recover the deficient Ship Channel, the USACE dredged 58.4 million cubic yards of material from Southwest Pass. The dredged material was beneficially used to restore 1,724 acres of marsh and wetlands in the environmentally sensitive birds'-foot delta the new record amount for beneficial use. The 58.4 million cubic yards of sediment dredged is the second largest amount ever dredged in the area of Southwest Pass. The record of 62.7 million cubic yards of material occurred after the 1973 Flood.

The BRC and navigation stakeholders depend on the USACE to protect the nation's navigable waterways and channels, the quoted information below is reproduced from USACE Headquarters website:

"The Navigation Mission of the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is to provide safe, reliable, efficient and environmentally sustainable waterborne transportation systems for the movement of commercial goods, for national security needs, and for recreation."

According to the Center for Disaster Philanthropy flooding in 2019 generated an emergency recovery need of \$14 billion related to weather and climate change disasters. The flooding along three rivers, the Arkansas, Mississippi and Missouri impacted 14 million people and placed 200 million lives at risk. The following quote is reproduced from an article by the Center for Disaster Philanthropy on March 14, 2019:

"The Mississippi River flooding from spring through July was the longest flood on record, breaking the 1927 Great Flood record. Unlike tornadoes or earthquakes that are geographically local, river flooding is usually a multi-state event. From a tiny stream coming out of Lake Itasca in northern Minnesota, the Mississippi River travels 2,350 miles south to the Gulf of Mexico. Along the way, hundreds of other tributaries – large and small – including the Ohio and Missouri Rivers feed into the Mississippi. The Mississippi River drainage basin includes water from parts or all of 31 states and two Canadian provinces. In fact, 41 percent of the contiguous U.S. and 15 percent of North America drain into the Mississippi River basin. Along with its distributary, the Atchafalaya River, the Mississippi/Atchafalaya River Basin (MARB), is the third largest in the world (after the Amazon and Congo basins) at 1,245,000 square miles. Once flooding has started in the north, there is little communities farther south can do besides prepare and wait."

Throughout the Great Flood of 2019 Congressional leaders and navigation industry representatives asked the BRC, how do we fix Southwest Pass? The Coalition believed that the only real response was to secure increased annual funding to allow the USACE to adequately respond with increased channel maintenance to recover from more frequently occurring emergencies caused by flooding and hurricanes.

The Big River Coalition's formal response was developed as the Full Funding Floats All Boats Campaign. The specific details and increased funding request were based on the deteriorating channel

# BIG RIVER COALITION

conditions and to avoid the almost constant emergency nature of increased appropriations requests. During this historic flood event, the Coalition actively engaged with Congressional members to advocate for appropriation increases to proliferate the USACE's ability to maintain federally authorized channel dimensions.

The Full Funding Floats All Boats Campaign requested the President's Budget Request be increased to a level of \$200,000,000 annually in an effort to promote trade, create jobs and enhance economic prosperity. The Big River Coalition estimates that \$200 million in annual funding would enhance the USACE's ability to restore and maintain Congressionally authorized channel dimensions.

The Coalition's funding campaign was not directly responsible for the improvements that would eventually be afforded by the Fiscal Year 2020 Energy and Water Development Appropriations Bill. However, the Regional Dredge Demonstration Program that was included in the Energy and Water Development Appropriations effort stimulated positive actions that were incorporated into the USACE Work Plan for Fiscal Year 2020, including the Regional Dredge Demonstration Program.

The following quotes are reproduced from the RDDP language:

"Significant --and occasionally even historic --storm events continue to occur across the nation, impacting critical Federal commercial navigation projects throughout the United States."

"The goal of the Regional Dredge Demonstration Program is to minimize disruption to the delivery of the dredging mission, and of the vital cargo which depends on execution of this missional across the Nation, as a result of the significant shoaling in the Gulf region."

"To respond more effectively to critical national dredging national dredging requirements resulting from these significant recurring storm events, in combination with the routine annual dredging demands, the Corps shall execute a multi-year dredging demonstration program with the Central Gulf Coast Region."

Key points from the Regional Dredge Demonstration Program as detailed within the Energy and Water Appropriations Bill also focus on the Mississippi River Ship Channel and specify actions designed to improve channel availability in Southwest Pass:

Regional Dredge Demonstration Program – \$525 million to establish a dredge demonstration program in the Gulf of Mexico and lower Mississippi River to dredge the lower Mississippi River channel and prevent opening of the Bonnet Carré Spillway in the future.

The following bulleted list includes justifying language reproduced from the RDDP:

- High hopper dredge utilization rates have resulted in limited dredge availability for nationally significant dredging products in recent years, in some cases critically impacting the acquisition process, particularly in the case of the Southwest Pass of the Mississippi River Baton Rouge to Gulf project. Corps dredging operations are basically planned, executed, and funded on a project-by-project basis, in an incremental fashion, on an annual cycle. To respond more effectively to critical national dredging requirements resulting from these significant recurring storm events, in combination with routine annual dredging demands, the Corps shall execute a multi-year dredging demonstration program within the Central Gulf Coast Region.

# BIG RIVER COALITION

- Considering the increasingly common recurrence of annual requirements for emergency dredging at the Southwest Pass, as well as the uncertainty that this response places on other dredging projects being executed by the U.S. hopper fleet across the entire Gulf Coast and Eastern seaboard, the Corps shall establish such a regional program, focused on the central Gulf Coast. By including the Mississippi River Baton Rouge to Gulf (Southwest Pass) and other nearby Gulf Coast commercial navigation projects, goals of the program will include being more responsive to dredging demands within the region, while minimizing disruption to critical construction and maintenance dredging requirements enterprise wide.
- Fewer disruptions to other projects across the enterprise due to emergencies at Southwest Pass (pulling dredges off projects).
- Fewer “no bid” responses at Mississippi River Baton Rouge to Gulf hopper dredge contracts.

Through the RDDP and the funding made available for the first time ever, the USACE New Orleans District was able to issue hopper dredge contracts in advance of shoaling. The following hopper dredge contracts were awarded due to this effort with dredging to be conducted in Fiscal Year 2021: the GLENN EDWARDS was awarded a contract on April 21, 2020, the hopper dredge STUYVESANT was awarded a contract on May 29, 2020, and the NEWPORT was awarded a contract on June 30, 2020. All three hoppers are presently working in Southwest Pass. The use of the regional contract shared between USACE Districts was also helpful tool to employ the NEWPORT in Southwest Pass and in Pascagoula. Other adjustments are that passes of the Mississippi River are also being dredged with South Pass being dredge for the first time since 2007 and Tiger Pass for the first time since 2012.

The Big River Coalition supports increased federal investments designed to increase channel maintenance and believe the federal investments encourage dredge contractors to justify long-term capital investments to build new dredges. There is no direct correlation but since the Regional Dredge Demonstration Program was implemented and federal investments for channel maintenance have increased the Mississippi River Ship Channel is operating without draft restrictions and the dredge contractors are building a record number of new dredges. The dredge contractors are presently building a total of three new hopper dredges with two additional hoppers in the design phases and two new cutterhead suction dredges as listed:

## **HOPPER DREDGES:**

- 1) FREDERICK A. PAUP: Manson Construction is building the largest of the new hoppers, the 15,000 cubic yard hopper dredge is expected to be delivered in mid-2023.  
Shipyard: Keppel AmFELS in Brownsville, Texas
- 2) R.B. WEEKS: Weeks Marine is building this new 8,550 cubic yard hopper similar in design and capacity to their hopper dredge MAGDALEN that was added to the fleet in 2018. The R.B. WEEKS' delivery is expected in early 2023.  
Shipyard: Eastern Shipbuilding in Panama City, Florida.
- 3) NAME TO DETERMINED: Great Lakes Dredge and Dock is building a new 6,500 cubic yard hopper dredge that is expected to be delivered in early 2023.  
Shipyard: Conrad Shipyard in Morgan City, Louisiana.
- 4) NAME TO BE DETERMINED: Cashman Dredging is in the Design Phase for an 8,500 to 6,500 cubic yard hopper dredge.
- 5) NAME TO BE DETERMINED: Dutra Group is in the Project Development Phase with an 8,000 to 6,000 cubic yard capacity hopper dredge.

# BIG RIVER COALITION

## CUTTERHEAD DREDGES:

- 1) GENERAL BRADLEY: Callan Marine is building this 28” cutterhead suction dredge with delivery expected later this year. Shipyard: Halimar Shipyard in Morgan City, Louisiana.
- 2) LORRAINE HOOKS: Mike Hooks, LLC is constructing this 27” cutterhead suction dredge with delivery expected in 2022. Shipyard: Mobile Pulley Works in Mobile, Alabama.

The new dredges represent increased jobs in U.S. shipyards with all the work listed above being built in the Gulf Coast Region.

The Big River Coalition will distribute similar letters to members of Congress to help promote and support the Regional Dredge Demonstration Program. The Coalition encourages Congress to continue the focus, 2021 is the first in several years where the Mississippi River Ship Channel is not plagued by draft restrictions or the economic losses associated with reduced cargo carrying efficiencies. The USACE’s ability to contract dredges in advance has been effective and reduces the risk that industry dredges have to be released from other contracts to respond to emergency conditions on the Mississippi River. The benefits of sufficient funding, regional dredge contracts, issuing dredge contracts in advance and the capital investments from the dredge contractors are positive changes that should continue. In fairness 2021 is the first year in several years that high river conditions have not triggered the emergency operation of the Bonnet Carré Spillway but increased dredging does serve to increase the Mississippi River’s water carrying capacity.

Sincerely,

**Sean M. Duffy, Sr.**

Sean M. Duffy, Sr.  
Executive Director

CC: Louisiana Congressional Delegation