Water Level Management Update

Volume 2, Issue 1 July 1999

Welcome, this is the third newsletter discussing the potential water level reduction in Upper Mississippi River Pool 8. The intention of these updates is to provide current information on the status of the proposal, report on meeting outcomes and furnish a timetable for future significant dates.

Current Task Force Recommendation for a Water Level Reduction for Pool 8

Two Control Points

- Lock and Dam 8 - A maximum water level reduction of 1.5-feet
- La Crosse Gage (Isle La Plume) - A minimum gage reading of 4.2 which is the same as a maximum reduction of a 0.5 foot from normal operation

The water level at Lock and Dam 8 would be held at 628.5 mean sea level elevation (1.5 feet below normal operations) until the elevation at the La Crosse gage reaches 4.2 (630.5 elevation). This operation scenario works until flows at Lock and Dam 8 fall below 28,000 cubic feet per second. When flows fall below this level, water will be raised in the lower portion of the pool to maintain the 4.2 gage reading at the La Crosse gage.

The purpose of implementing a water level reduction with a minimum elevation at the La Crosse gage is to minimize the effects on commercial and recreational uses in the upper portion of the pool where most facilities are located. Portions of the pool located north of the La Crosse gage will have up to a half-foot reduction, while areas south of the gage will have reductions between a half a foot and 1.5 feet. This reduction will occur during a window from **June 15 to September 15, 2000**.

What does this mean at a particular location?

Listed below are three different rates of flow through Lock and Dam 8.

1. **40,600** cubic per second is a typical early summer flow. There will be no impacts to the upper portion of pool 8 at this flow level or above.
2. **28,000** cubic feet per second represents the lowest flow rate whereby the COE can maintain 4.2 at the La Crosse Stage Gage and a 1.5 feet reduction in the lower portion of the pool.
3. **22,000** cubic feet per second represents a low summer flow that will effect the reduction in the lower portion of Pool 8, while maintaining 4.2 at the La Crosse Gage (See*).

See map on next page.

Using the above flows this is what can be expected:

Interstate 90 Bridge - River Mile 701.8
1 No impact
2 1 inch reduction from normal low summer flows(-0.1')
3 5 inch reduction form normal low summer flows (-0.4')

La Crosse Gage – River Mile 696.8
1. No impact (Gage would be at 5.5)
2. 6 inch reduction from normal summer low flows (- 0.5')
3. 6 inch reduction from normal summer low flows (- 0.5')

Mouth of Root River – River Mile 693.7
1. No impact
2. 11 inch reduction from normal summer low flows (-0.9')
3. 7 inch reduction from normal summer low flows (-0.6')*

Brownsville, MN – River Mile 689.0
1. 1 inch reduction from normal summer low flows (-0.9')
2. 17 inch reduction from normal summer low flows (-1.4')
3. 7 inch reduction from normal summer low flows (-0.6')*

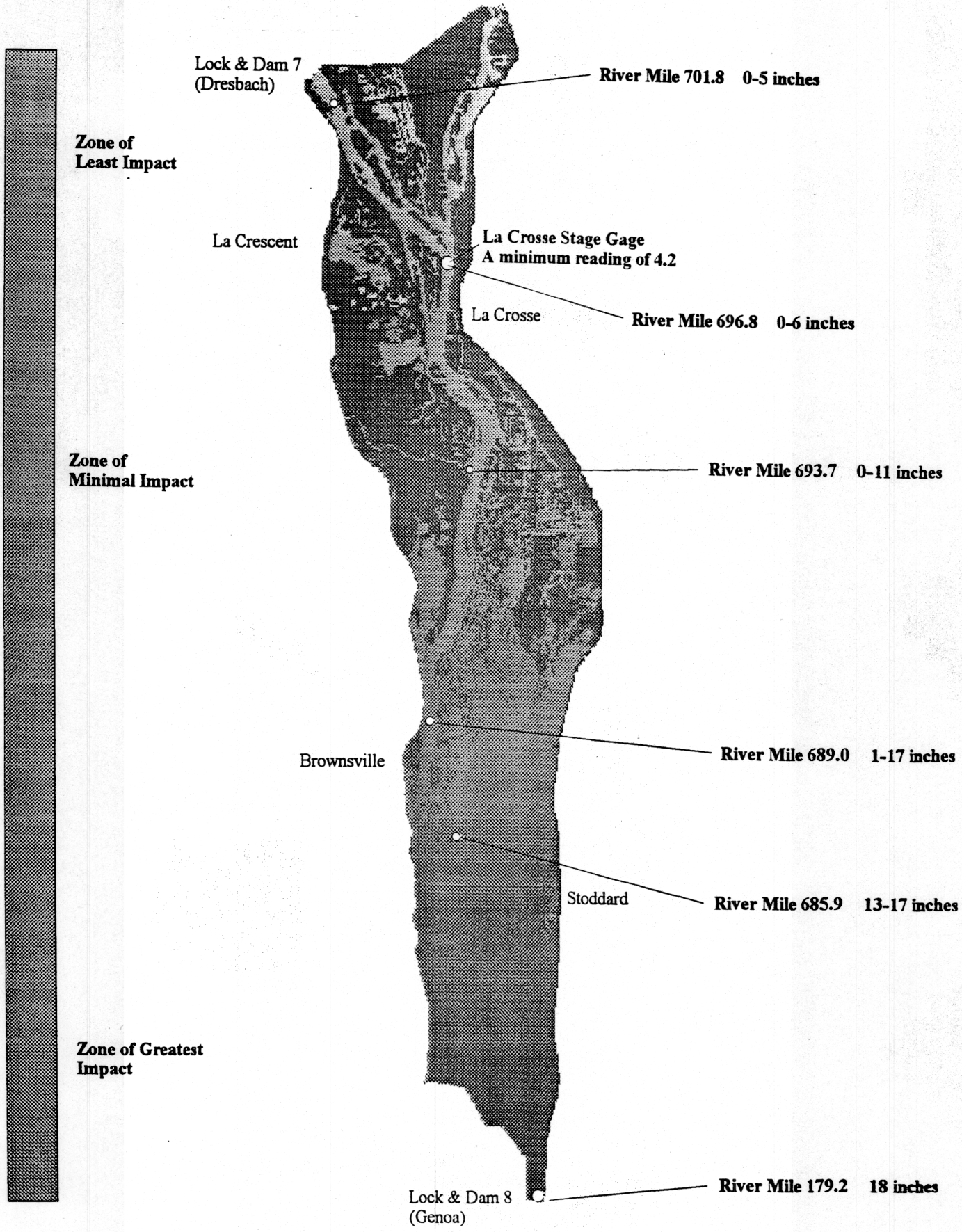
Stoddard, WI – River Mile 685.9
1. 13 inch reduction from normal summer low flows (-1.1')
2. 17 inch reduction from normal summer low flows (-1.4')
3. 7 inch reduction from normal summer low flows (-0.6')*

Lock and Dam 8 – River Mile 679.2
1. 18 inch reduction from normal summer low flows (-1.5')
2. 18 inch reduction from normal summer low flows (-1.5')
3. 6 inch reduction from normal summer low flows (-0.5')*

Other Important Information if current recommendation is implemented:

- It should expose about **2575 acres of shallow water habitat** to promote plant growth.
- **Three of the 12 Commercial Recreational Facilities** could be affected and would require some limited dredging to maintain access.
- **Six of the 18 Boat Ramps** could be affected, limiting use to small boats, unless measures such as extending the ramps are employed.
- **Seven of the 14 commercial operations** would be affected and would require limited dredging to maintain access.
- The **nine-foot commercial navigation channel would be maintained** by dredging 115,000 cubic yards of material from the channel. This represents approximately 80,000 cubic yards more than an average year.
- **The year 2000 is the earliest** the water level reduction could be done. If weather patterns indicate a very wet year or a very dry year the demonstration would probably not proceed that year.

Expected Water Level Reduction
Based on 18" Reduction at Lock & Dam 8



Public Meetings Held in March

In early March, the Water Level Management Task Force held a series of three meetings (Stoddard, Brownsville and Onalaska) to provide the public with an opportunity to obtain more information about the current recommendations for a Pool 8 water level reduction. (See "Current Recommendations for a Water Level Reduction for Pool 8" in this newsletter.) At each meeting a slide show presentation was shown at least three times to provide information about the recommendation. Members of the public were given an opportunity to ask questions and provide comments about the water level reduction recommendation.

The most frequently asked question during the meetings was the concern over lost opportunity for boating access from boat landings and marinas. Participants were informed of a federal program, Section 1135, that **may be** a potential source of assistance with access dredging.

The 1135 program provides a 75% cost-share to dredge areas to allow access during the water level reduction. The remaining 25% must come from a non-federal partner. The 25% may come from a variety of sources such as the Wisconsin Recreation Boating Fund or the individuals or companies benefitting from the dredging. At this time, the Minnesota-Wisconsin Boundary Area Commission has tentatively committed to being the "sponsor" or fiscal agent for the 25% cost-share monies. This does not mean they will be paying the 25%, they will, however, be submitting the grant request, processing the paperwork and coordinating with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) on the dredging.

Following are summaries of the written comments from each of the March public meetings:

Stoddard, WI, March 2, 1999 - Attendance = 81

- I would like a copy of the Environmental Statement.
- Go for it! More info on benefits – large and small – i.e. critters, water qual, etc. Have mike avail if background noise develops.
- As of today, the water level at Lax is 5.1 – I find this hard to believe as I keep marks of the level on my house – It's about 1 foot lower – Who is trying to fool who – Its been this way since they so called fixed the river gage.
- If there is to be voluntary efforts by locals – I would like to volunteer.
- I am in favor of the drawdown.
- Genoa Land and Commercial fishing harbor dredging. Need information about 1135.

Brownsville, MN, March 3, 1999 - Attendance = 39

- During drawdown why can't they only guarantee a six foot channel for barge traffic. For this period only – Let them design their barges to fit the river instead of designing the river for someone's idea of the barge. Why continue a welfare program for barge companies – ADM, Cargill, and other companies costing taxpayers millions.
- Very informative, Good update and status.
- I think the last 2 yrs have brought down the water enough to give us enough new growth – Thanks to zebra mussels.

Onalaska, WI, March 4, 1999 - Attendance about 50
(Numerous people did not sign in at the La Crosse meeting so attendance levels are an estimate of the people present.)

- Please info me of the 1135 meeting. Thank you.
- Invite to 1135 meeting.
- Plz notify me about 1135 meeting.
- Please notify me of 1135 meeting.
- Please provide information about wingdam hazards.

Section 1135 Program Meeting

On Monday, April 12, 1999 an informational meeting was held for members of the public who expressed an interest in a federal program called "1135". The 1135 program **may** provide money for dredging problem areas **if** a water level reduction is conducted in Pool 8 during the summer of 2000. Forty-nine invitations were sent out for the meeting with 19 people attending.

Mr. Gary Palesh, St. Paul District Corps of Engineers, began the meeting by discussing the requirements of the Section 1135 program. He explained that the 1135 program is a 75% federal and a 25% non-federal cost-share program that may be used in Pool 8 to do advanced dredging in shallow areas **outside** the main channel.

The 25% cost-share is the responsibility of the benefactor of the dredging, which could mean a business, a neighborhood or a local municipality. Dredging which will be considered under the 1135 program is dredging which will occur off the main channel and is needed to provide access which would be lost from the water level reduction.

The depth of the dredging will be determined by the estimated water depth which will be lost during the water reduction plus 6 inches. For example, access right at the Genoa dam would be eligible for cost-sharing 24 inches dredging (18 inches, the amount of water lost, plus an additional 6 inches). Access sites in La Crosse would be eligible for 12 inches of dredging through the cost-share (6 inches of water reduction plus 6 inches).

Mary Van Fossen, Wisconsin DNR, discussed a Wisconsin State program called the Recreational Boating Fund (RBF) and provided application packets to those who were interested. This program is a 50-50 cost-share program, but, in specific situations the State money **may** provide the cost-share portion for the Federal 1135 money.

Here are some questions asked by the meeting participants:

Have any areas been officially surveyed?

- All boat ramps have been surveyed, selected sites that were known to have potential problems and there is bathymetric data for the pool. However, this meeting was held in part to define additional sites to survey.

The EMP Trempealeau project hasn't been evaluated yet and still your moving ahead with a much larger scale project and you don't know the results of the Trempealeau project.

- Water level management is a proven technique used around the country to stimulate plant growth. We have done three water level reductions on small backwater areas, called Small Bay West, Lizzy Paul Pond, and Peck Lake near Pools 5 and 9. All areas have shown positive results.

There was a large fish kill at Lauderdale this year; can anyone tell me why?

- Gizzard shad die-offS during the winter are quite common up and down the river. Shad are extremely temperature sensitive and susceptible to low oxygen levels. It occurs every year but this year we did not have much flow to flush the fish downstream and they ended up in front of people's homes that live on the river.

Won't more plants use more oxygen and kill more fish?

- While it's true that plants do use oxygen when they die, a diverse plant community is necessary for a healthy fish community and the benefits of having plants far outweighs any detrimental effects that occur when the plants die. The areas where the fish kills occurred where man-made and experience high commercial fishing use, both of which could impact the shad.

How difficult or time consuming is the 1135 grant process?

- The process will be much simplified because the total cost will be under $300,000, however, the sponsor will be required to make the application.

Is someone going to generate the estimates on the locations that may require dredging to determine the quantities and costs?

- The COE will look at the sites and generate the estimates within the next month, citizens need to determine a sponsor and send any other locations, which need estimates to Gary Palesh, USACE – St. Paul District, 190 5th Street East, St. Paul, MN 55101 (651) 290-5282 by May 15.
- Individual groups can pay to have more dredging done (more than the effects of the drawdown plus six inches) under the same permit but need to make these wishes known before the grant and permits are written **not** after the permit has been granted.
- There will **not be a permit fee** for dredging the identified areas through the 1135 program, which will be limited to effects of the drawdown plus 6 inches.
- The money will not be cost-shared to pay for maintenance dredging

When will the dredging be done?

- Late spring of 2000.

Where will the dredge spoil go?

- Isle la Plume by La Crosse, WI or the containment site at Brownsville, MN.

What will the COE's ability be to react to unforeseen problems as the drawdown takes place? Can there be a 1 or 2 day trial this fall to let people see what the proposed water depth will be?

- There will be numerous people and equipment staged in and around Pool 8 if a water level reduction is attempted during the summer of 2000. Collectively, the agencies should have the ability to respond quickly to most problems.
- A 1 or 2 day trial will require at least 2 ½ weeks to complete. If we lower the pool in a day or two we will kill numerous fish and mussels. The current recommendation requires that the pool is not dropped more than two-tenths of a foot per day. This is designed into the project to give fish and native mussels a chance to move to deeper water. A one to two day trial is not recommended. Local river users know the areas of concern, we have good data and we can survey additional areas if additional information is necessary.
- The Corps will have the appropriate number of people at Lock and Dam 8 to operate the gates.
- There will be a 1-800 number in place for people to report problems.

Mr. Palesh also reported on the Environmental Assessment out for public review. Over 900 letters and 300 complete reports were sent out to interested members of the public and if anyone from the group wanted more information they could get it from Gary after the meeting.

Below is the Timeline From the Past and for the Future.

Past:	
January 98	Held public meeting in Wabasha, MN, Onalaska, WI and Lansing, IA to inform public of benefits of a water level reduction and to determine which pool may be a good candidate from a public perspective to conduct a pool-wide water level reduction demonstration. Two hundred and thirteen people attended these meetings.
February 98	Pool 8 was chosen to study the feasibility of conducting a water level reduction to demonstrate the habitat benefits of a pool-wide water level reduction.
May 98	Public meetings were held in Stoddard, WI and Brownsville, MN to provide information about the potential water level reduction in Pool 8 and to get public reaction in the area that will be most effected by water level change.
July 98	Special meeting held in La Crosse to provide information about the potential water level reduction in Pool 8 and hear public comment.
December 98	The River Resources Forum endorses a maximum eighteen inch reduction at Lock and Dam 8 and a maximum six reduction at the La Crosse gage.
January 99	Recommendation is released to public media.
March 99	Held public meetings in Stoddard, WI, Brownsville, MN, and Onalaska, WI to provide information about the recommendation and to give public a chance to comment.
April 99	The draft Environmental Assessment (EA) is released for 30 day public review period. Over 300 EA's were sent to agency staff and the general public for review.
May 99	Comment period ends for the EA and final preparation for report to Corps of Engineers Division office in Vicksburg, MS is underway.
FUTURE:	
June 99	Pre-monitoring for water quality, sediment, plants and invertebrates begins in anticipation of approval and to make sure that pre-project data is collected. If project is not completed the information will still be valuable from a biological perspective.
June 99	Final report will be sent to Division in Vicksburg, MS to ask for permission to operate outside the normal operating band for Lock and Dam 8 and Pool 8.
September 99	Corps of Engineers Division is expected to give final approval or denial to operate Lock and Dam 8 outside normal operating band.
May 2000	If final approval is granted and water level conditions are favorable, water depth surveys will be underway to determine where dredging should take place and dredging will be completed .
June 2000	Water level will be reduction by 18" at the dam. Water level will be closely monitored at the La Crosse gage to assure a maximum reduction of 6" in the upper portion of Pool 8.
September 2000	Water level will be raised to normal operating levels.
2001-2005	The effect of the water level reduction will be monitored from both a biological and a social perspective.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns they can be addressed to one of the following people.

Gary Palesh USACE – St. Paul District 190 Fifth Street East St. Paul, MN 55101 651-290-5282 US Army Corps of Engineers	Tim Schlagenhaft MDNR 1801 South Oak Street Lake City, MN 55041 651-345-3365 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Gretchen Benjamin WDNR 3550 Mormon Coulee Road La Crosse, WI 54601 608-785-9982 Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources	Keith Beseke USFWS 51 East 4th Street Winona, MN 55987 507-452-4232 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Upcoming Meetings:

The next **Section 1135** meeting will be held on **Wednesday, July 14 at 6:00 p.m.** at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Resource Building at 555 Lester Avenue, Onalaska, WI. For more information on the meeting, contact Gary Palesh, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, (651) 290-5282 or Gretchen Benjamin, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, (608) 785-9982.

Reminder:

If you belong to a group or organization that would like to learn more about the water level reduction proposal, a speaker will come to your group and provide a presentation and answer questions. To schedule a speaker, please contact Gretchen Benjamin, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, (608) 785-9982.