



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**
St. Paul District

Public Notice

Projects: Upper Mississippi River Pool 6 Drawdown,
Buffalo and Trempealeau Counties, Wisconsin, and Winona
County, Minnesota

Date: May 1, 2008

In Reply Refer to:
Environmental and Economic
Analysis Branch

Project Proponent. St. Paul District, Corps of Engineers, 190 Fifth Street East, Suite 401,
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-1638

Project Authority and Background. This public notice describes a proposed plan to draw down water levels in Pool 6 of the Mississippi River for environmental benefit. This water level management project is part of the St. Paul District's Mississippi River operations and maintenance program. The 9-Foot Navigation Channel Project on the Upper Mississippi River (UMR) was authorized by the River and Harbor Act of 1930, which approved construction of a series of locks and dams, supplemented with channel maintenance dredging. Regulation of the navigation pools is governed by a "Master Regulation Manual for Mississippi River Nine Foot Channel Navigation Projects, St. Paul District," supplemented by appendixes describing the regulation of each individual pool.

The St. Paul District, in cooperation with the Water Level Management Task Force (WLMTF) of the River Resources Forum (RRF), has been evaluating navigation pool drawdown on the UMR to improve fish and wildlife habitat since 1996. The RRF is a coordinating body made up of Federal and State agencies with management responsibilities on the UMR within the St. Paul District, as well as nongovernmental organizations with an interest in the river.

A document entitled: "Draft Letter Report/Environmental Assessment – Pool Drawdown, Pool 6, Upper Mississippi River, March 2008," describes the proposed action.

Project Location. Pool 6 and Lock and Dam 6 are part of the 9-foot navigation channel project on the Upper Mississippi River, 714.2 river miles above the mouth of the Ohio River and 14.3 river miles below Lock and Dam 5A. Lock and Dam 6 is at Trempealeau, Wisconsin, and approximately 10 miles below Winona, Minnesota. Lock and Dam 5A is located immediately above Winona. Pool 6 is bordered by Wisconsin along the left descending bank and Minnesota along the right descending bank.

Project Purpose. The drawdown would provide an opportunity for reestablishment of emergent aquatic plants and consolidation of sediment. A major objective is to maximize habitat benefits while minimizing adverse biological effects, as well as effects on commercial and recreational interests and river resources, and to minimize additional channel maintenance requirements. The proposed drawdown would increase the level of knowledge regarding the effects of pool drawdown to support an adaptive management approach to future decisions concerning the use of this management measure.

Proposed Action and Schedule. The St. Paul District, Corps of Engineers, in cooperation with the RRF and associated subgroup, the WLMTF, is proposing a pool-scale drawdown of a maximum of 1.0 foot at Lock and Dam 6, with a maximum 0.5-foot reduction in pool elevation midpool at the primary control point at Winona. The drawdown is proposed for the 2008 growing season or the earliest year possible. The drawdown would begin on or near June 16 with the lowering of the pool at Lock and Dam 6 approximately 0.2 foot per day until 1.0-foot drawdown at the lock and dam has been reached. Termination of the drawdown would begin on or about September 15 when the pool level at Lock and Dam 6 would be allowed to rise at a rate of approximately 0.2 foot per day. The goal is to have regulation of Pool 6 return to normal operations by October 1, 2008.

Alternatives. Four alternative plans were considered:

1. No action
2. 1.0-foot drawdown at Lock and Dam 6, no change at Primary Control Point (Winona)
3. 1.0-foot drawdown at Lock and Dam 6, maximum of 2.0-foot drawdown at Primary Control Point
4. 1.0-foot drawdown at Lock and Dam 6, maximum of 0.5-foot drawdown at Primary Control Point

Summary of Environmental Impacts. The deterioration of aquatic vegetation beds over the last 60 years in Pool 6 resulting from changed hydraulic regime and increased sedimentation has reduced habitat quality in this pool. The proposed drawdown would provide an opportunity for reestablishment of emergent aquatic plants and consolidation of sediment. An increase in the abundance of emergent and submersed aquatic plants would improve habitat conditions and provide a valuable source of food for a variety of organisms, including young-of-year and small fish, migratory birds, wading birds, furbearers, reptiles, and amphibians.

Overall, the proposed Pool 6 drawdown project should have minor to substantial positive long-term impacts on shallow aquatic and wetland habitat, terrestrial habitat, recreational opportunities, aesthetic values, biological productivity, and water quality. Minor adverse impacts on recreational boating and boating facilities are expected during the drawdown. Impacts of a Mississippi River pool drawdown on commercial navigation will be minimal. Short-term adverse effects on suspended sediment and macroinvertebrates in the drawdown zone will be alleviated upon reflooding. Mussel mortality is expected as a result of the drawdown. Endangered species should not be adversely affected.

A drawdown zone up to about 500 acres will provide an opportunity for reestablishment of emergent aquatic plants and consolidation of sediment. Submersed aquatic plants may receive additional light and become more abundant in an additional 500 acres. The consolidated sediment should have greater shear strength and resist resuspension by wave action upon reflooding. Increased vegetation and water clarity in lower Pool 6 would improve habitat conditions for a variety of fish and wildlife. If river discharge conditions allow the proposed drawdown to be maintained through most of the growing season with limited reflooding, these ecological benefits could persist for a number of years.

Monitoring and evaluation of the drawdown will provide valuable information on application of this method of river regulation for habitat restoration.

Coordination. The project is a multiparty effort involving Federal, State, and local agencies, public interest groups, representatives of river user groups, and the public. The study was conducted under the auspices of the WLMTF of the RRF. The project has been coordinated with the States of Wisconsin and Minnesota, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, commercial navigation interests, environmental groups, and recreational interests. In compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, the District has coordinated the proposed actions with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, relative to threatened and endangered species. Pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 USC § 470 (NHPA), consultation with the Minnesota and Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO) and other agencies has been completed or is ongoing.

Water Level Management Update newsletters that discussed the Pool 6 drawdown were published in January 2003, April 2003, April 2004, and August 2007. The Water Level Management Update newsletter is sent to more than 1,000 interested parties. In addition, information concerning the project, as well as general information on the water level management program, is posted on the St. Paul District Water Level Management Web Page, which can be accessed at the following web address:
<http://www.mvp.usace.army.mil/environment/default.asp?pageid=122> .

Press releases and media interviews regarding the drawdown will occur beginning in May, and will continue as needed or requested during the drawdown.

Public Meeting. Two public meetings were held in September 2007 to present plans for a 2008 minor drawdown of Pool 6. Two additional public meetings outlining the proposed action are scheduled for May 2008: Tuesday, May 6, from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. at the Trempealeau Village Hall, Community Room, Trempealeau, Wisconsin, and Wednesday, May 7, from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. at Winona State University, Kryzsko Commons Dining Room B, Winona, Minnesota. The Letter Report and Environmental Assessment can be viewed at local libraries and on the web at the web address shown above, or it can be obtained by contacting Mr. Dan Kelner at the address below.

Who Should Reply? Any interested parties that may be affected by the proposed action are invited to submit to this office facts, arguments, or objections to the proposal within 30 days of this notice. These statements should bear upon the adequacy of plans and suitability of locations and should, if appropriate, suggest any changes considered desirable. Statements should indicate that they are in response to this public notice. All replies should be addressed to the District Engineer, St. Paul District, Corps of Engineers, ATTN: PM-E, 190 Fifth Street East, Suite 401, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-1638. Mr. Dan Kelner can be contacted for additional information by telephone at (651) 290-5277 or by email at daniel.e.kelner@mvp.usace.army.mil,

Public Hearing. Anyone who has an interest that may be affected by the proposed action may request a public hearing on this project. Anyone interested in a public hearing must submit a written request to the District Engineer at the address given above. This written request must

clearly set forth the interest that may be affected and how it may be affected by this activity. The District Engineer has the authority to modify the plan if comments and statements are received pursuant to this public notice that, in his judgment, reveal the necessity of modifying the proposed action, following appropriate consultation.

4/28/08
Date



Terry J. Birkenstock
Chief, Environmental and Economic
Analysis Branch