

WHAT'S THE STATUS OF MINOR DRAWDOWNS OF POOLS 6 AND 9?

The Water Level Management Task Force has been investigating the potential for minor drawdowns of 1-foot or less that would require no additional dredging of the main channel for commercial navigation. Pools 6 and 9 were chosen as candidates and planning was initiated to implement minor drawdowns on both pools in 2003. The task force thought these drawdowns would be relatively simple and without controversy. Then, came the snags.

1. Two recreational sites require access dredging prior to a minor drawdown.
2. Main channel dredging cannot exceed what would routinely be done to maintain the channel.
3. River flows must be in the range of 25,000 - 75,000 cubic feet per second.
4. Cultural resources considerations.
5. Public support must continue for the project.

In Pool 9, concerns over barge fleeing and cultural resources impacts, and in Pool 6 concerns over **recreational** boat access, caused the task force to delay the drawdowns until these issues could be resolved. Several

Pool 6 Minor Drawdown

Public Meeting

6 p.m. Open House

7-9 p.m. Formal Meeting

May 11, 2004

Southeastern Technical
College

1250 Homer Road
Winona, MN

A public meeting will provide an update on May 11, 2004.

**ENVIRONMENTAL
POOL PLANS
AVAILABLE**

ideas for solving these problems were suggested and the task force agreed to address them during the fall and winter of 2003.

The task force met in February to discuss progress. For Pool 9, the barge fleeing and cultural resources issues have not been resolved. The task force decided to drop the idea of minor drawdowns in this pool, but to continue to address these issues in anticipation of a larger scale demonstration drawdown in the future.

In Pool 6, five criteria must be met to implement a one-foot drawdown from mid-June to mid-September of 2004.

The Fish and Wildlife Work Group, an interagency task force working on fish and wildlife issues, recently published environmental pool plans for Mississippi River pools 1-10. These plans depict a desired future condition for the river and will provide a blueprint for future habitat restoration projects.

Water level management, including a drawdown, is a fundamental component of these plans and a primary tool for restoring aquatic vegetation. Plans can be viewed on the web at www.mvp.usace.army.mil/environment, then click on Mississippi River Environmental Pool Plans on the right side of the screen. You may also contact Tim Yager, chair of the Fish and Wildlife Work Group, at 612-713-5365.

WHY IS A DRAWDOWN NEEDED ON POOL 5?

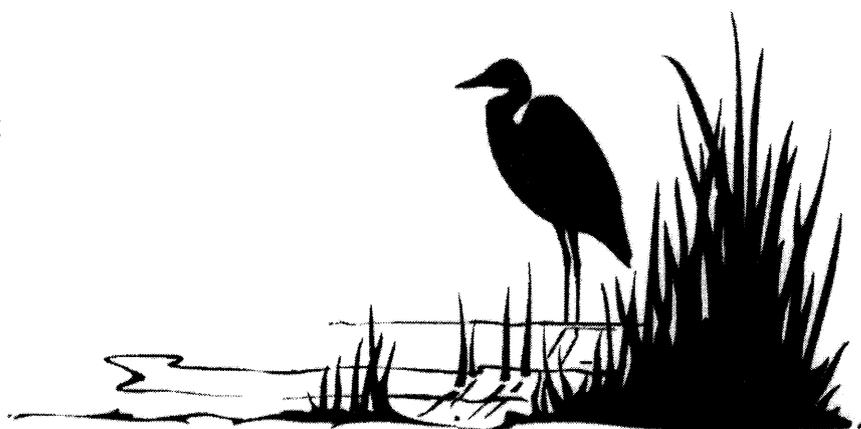
Like other pools on the Mississippi River, Pool 5 experienced an initial “boom” in marsh habitat and fish and wildlife populations following construction of the Locks and Dams in the 1930s.

Fish and wildlife flourished until the 1960s, when habitat quality began to decline as islands were eroded away and sediment filled backwaters and side channels. Large windswept areas developed and combined with a lack of a drying cycle, plant beds disappeared or were greatly reduced.

In Pool 5, these conditions were most apparent in Weaver Bottoms, Spring Lake, and the lower portion of the pool. The loss of habitat also impacted hunting and fishing patterns. For example, at one time, there were more than a dozen duck hunting camps in Weaver Bottoms; now, there are none. Hundreds of ice anglers trying their luck was once a routine sight; now, only a few persist. Trapping was also impacted as the muskrats disap-

peared along with the habitat.

The results of the drawdowns on Pool 8 have proven water level management is a way to restore important aquatic vegetation and improve fish and wildlife habitat. This translates into a healthier river and better hunting and fishing. Lowering water levels during the summer growing season in Pool 5 should have similar results.



PLANNING CONTINUES FOR A POOL 5 DRAWDOWN

Issues surrounding commercial navigation and recreational boat access continue to be discussed in anticipation of a Pool 5 drawdown on the Mississippi River. The drawdown could occur as early as summer 2005, if remaining issues can be addressed.

The cost of dredging the main channel prior to drawdown remains a significant obstacle. Maintaining sufficient depth for continued operation of barges during a drawdown could cost approximately \$700,000 to over \$2 million, depending on how far water levels are dropped.

Public meetings held last May indicated strong support for a drawdown to increase aquatic vegetation

and improve fish and wildlife habitat. Recreational users and residents near Pool 5 expressed concerns about recreational boating access, but also recognized the significant habitat losses that have occurred in the lower portions of the pool that need to be restored.

While a range of one-foot to four-feet of drawdown is being studied, something in the middle is most likely. The Water Level Management Task Force, which includes representatives from state and federal agencies, the barge industry and local citizens will consider all the information available and decide on a recommended drawdown level this fall or winter.

CITIZENS COMMITTEE HELPS ADDRESS RECREATIONAL ACCESS FOR POTENTIAL POOL 5 DRAWDOWN

A Citizen's Advisory Committee was formed last August to help address recreational access issues associated with a Pool 5 drawdown. Approximately 15 citizens representing local governments, businesses, hunters, fishermen and recreational boaters attended the initial meeting, which included a tour of potential problem areas.

The committee worked hard during the fall and winter and in February 2004 presented a map to the Water Level Management Task Force showing areas where access would be critical during a drawdown. The map includes seven locations where boaters typically access the main channel from public and private accesses and docks where depths may be problematic. These areas would need to be dredged, to some extent, to maintain enough depth to navigate during a drawdown.

The committee also identified boat access sites in the pool and provided an explanation as to what sites were neces-

sary to keep open. Most sites on the Wisconsin side, with the exception of the Lower Spring Lake access, would be usable during a drawdown. On the Minnesota side, only Halfmoon Landing would be usable.

The Water Level Management Task Force will use the map to estimate dredging quantities and costs at each site under various drawdown depths. Options to reduce dredging costs will also be considered, such as shared docks where individuals affected by the drawdown could use a temporary dock for the summer season.

Mike Kennedy, co-chair of the Citizen's Committee, explained, "We hope that the agencies can use our map to provide a reasonable level of access and to successfully drawdown Pool 5. While we realize there will be inconveniences during a drawdown, we believe it is well worth the opportunity to bring back the fish and wildlife that once flourished."

VEGETATION RESPONSE TO 2001 AND 2002 SUMMER DRAWDOWNS ON UMR, POOL 8

Researchers continue to gather and analyze vegetation response information from the 2001 and 2002 Pool 8 drawdown. River scientists are waiting for interpretation of key information to be finalized and released, including aerial photography and land cover change analyses, to complete their drawdown analysis. In the meantime, there is other field information available from Kevin Kenow, U.S. Geological Survey, one of the primary researchers for the drawdown. Here is some of the information Kenow is reporting in presentations and reports.

The drawdown likely contributed to an increase in deep marsh annual, shallow marsh perennial, wet meadow, sand bar, submersed aquatic vegetation, wet meadow shrub, shallow marsh annual and mud communities in Pool 8. Common arrowhead (*Sagittaria latifolia* and *S. rigida*), false pimpernel (*Lindernia dubia*), water star-grass (*Heteranthera dubia*), stiff arrowhead (*Sagittaria rigida*) teal lovegrass (*Eragrostis hypnoides*), rice cut-grass (*Leersia oryzoides*) and chufa flatsedge (*Cyperus esculentus*) were the dominate species that developed on exposed substrates. These same aquatic plants responded to a 1999 seed bank study, as well as in the actual drawdown in 2001.

Timing and duration of drawdown varied throughout the Pool. In 2001, water levels on portions of the pool were

not effectively lowered for the entire growing season due to low summer flows and resulting constraints on water level management from commercial and recreational traffic. Plant density and diversity, as well as moist soil seed and arrowhead tuber production, were highest on those areas exposed for the longest period of the growing season

With the support of the public, a drawdown was conducted for a second consecutive year in 2002. River hydrology was nearly perfect, allowing for an 18-inch drawdown at the dam for 90 days without impacting commercial or recreational use on Pool 8. Growth of perennial emergent vegetation, established with the drawdown of 2001, was robust. Arrowhead tuber production increased 16-fold in selected areas and we observed a shift from a plant community dominated by annuals in 2001 to one dominated by perennials in 2002. Submersed aquatic vegetation did not appear to be negatively effected by the two years of drawdown.

River scientists are continuing to document the persistence of emergent perennial plant beds that were reestablished as a result of the drawdown and assessing the distribution and abundance of submersed aquatic vegetation. These findings convinced managers there would be a benefit to trying to drawdown Pool 8 for a second year.

**Water Level Management
Update
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