



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**®

St. Paul District

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Public Affairs

Corps Facts

Navigation

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Navigation

Navigation is travel or transportation over water. Many different kinds of boats and vessels are used on rivers to move people and products from one place to another. Navigation was extremely important for foreign and domestic trade and travel in the early days of our country before cars, trucks, trains and airplanes were invented. In those days, rivers were used as "roads" to connect inland settlements to river and coastal ports. Communities established at these ports became important economic, cultural and social hubs in the development of our nation. Many of the products we use and eat today are still transported by vessels on inland waterways. Towboats push barges loaded with products such as grain, coal and petroleum up and down rivers to loading and unloading facilities. Navigation activities in the United States take place at thousands of ports and terminals along more than 25,000 miles of waterways. Most rivers in the western part of the United States are not used for commercial navigation. Some of these rivers are used instead for recreation, irrigation and generation of electricity. Shallow harbors or rivers are made safe for navigation by dredging or the construction of locks and dams.

Locks and Dams

The Corps of Engineers maintains navigation channels, much like road crews maintain highways, and builds breakwaters or jetties to protect public property from shoreline erosion. A 9-foot navigation channel is maintained on the Upper Mississippi River, so river vessels can transport their goods north of St. Louis. To achieve a 9-foot channel in the Upper Mississippi River, Congress mandated that the Corps construct a system of navigation locks and dams in the 1930s. Dams are built on rivers to hold back water and form deeper navigation "pools." Most pools in the United States are maintained at a constant minimum water depth of 9 feet for safe navigation. Dams make it necessary for river vessels to use a series of locks to "step" up or down the river from one water level to another. Additional benefits from the locks and dams include adding river recreational areas for public use, providing water supply for several river communities and serving as nesting grounds for migratory birds. The St. Paul District has jurisdiction over the 13 uppermost structures, from No. 10 at Guttenberg, Iowa, to Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam in Minneapolis, as well as 1,300 wing dams and 200 revetments.

Navigation Channel

Sedimentation in the channel is caused by the normal cycle of silt movement, erosion from high water or heavy rains, overdevelopment along river banks and changes in river currents. To maintain the 9-foot navigation channel, material that settles in the channel area must be removed. Mechanical or hydraulic dredging are methods for the removal of that material. This material is placed in designated areas along the river. Some of these areas are beneficial use placement areas. Beneficial use of dredged material is the productive use of the material by the public or private sectors. Examples of common beneficial uses of dredged material in the St. Paul District are upland habitat development, wetland creation, aquatic habitat enhancement, creation of areas for bird nesting, beach nourishment, winter road maintenance, levee repair and improvement, aggregate for concrete, lining fly ash pits, bank protection and general purpose fill. The district is responsible for maintaining 243.6 miles of navigation channel to a depth of at least 9 feet on the Mississippi River from Minneapolis at river mile 857.6 to Guttenberg, Iowa, at river mile 614.0, and 40.6 miles on three tributaries: the Minnesota, St. Croix and Black rivers.