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Proposed Authorization of Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway Investments

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Proposed Authorization of Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway Investments

Summary

Thirty-seven lock and dam sites and thousands of channel training structures create a 9-foot-deep, 1,200-mile-long navigation channel known as the Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway (UMR-IWW) System. The UMR-IWW makes commercial navigation possible between Minneapolis and St. Louis on the Mississippi River, and along the Illinois Waterway from Chicago to the Mississippi River, thus facilitating low-cost barge transport of agricultural and other products to and from upper midwestern states. Since the 1980s, the system has experienced increasing traffic delays, raising concerns about competitiveness of U.S. products in some international markets. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), the agency responsible for the system, began studying the feasibility of navigation efficiency improvements in 1993. The study has been the subject of much controversy. In 2000, a Corps economist alleged that the agency manipulated analyses to support navigation investments, and a series of newspaper articles criticized the Corps' planning process for the UMR-IWW study and other Corps studies.

In response, the Corps halted the study, and reinitiated it in 2001 with a reformulated economic analysis and an ecosystem restoration objective. Ecosystem restoration was included to respond to criticisms that the study was too limited in its environmental analysis. The study objective for restoration is to identify measures that address ecosystem decline, including the ongoing effects of navigation operation and maintenance; the goal is to benefit a broad array of species by reducing the loss of habitat, habitat quality, and habitat diversity. Under the reformulated study, in September 2004, the Corps produced a final feasibility report recommending (1) a 50-year plan for combined navigation improvements and ecosystem restoration, and (2) authorization of an initial set of measures, including seven new locks, and an initial 15-year increment of restoration measures. The Corps recommended that the investments in the 50-year plan be made within an adaptive implementation framework, which would provide checkpoints for the Administration and Congress as more information was gained and project milestones were reached. The continuing debate over the urgency, necessity, and national benefit of expanded UMR-IWW navigation capacity now revolves around those recommendations.

Three pieces of legislation in the 108th Congress — H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773 (Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2004) — would authorize combined investments in navigation (\$1.73 billion) and ecosystem restoration (\$1.46 billion). The final feasibility report and the bills differ from the standard Corps feasibility report and authorizing language. The bills authorize most of the initial set of activities recommended in the Corps' feasibility report; the authorization, however, is not contingent on a recommendation by the Chief of Engineers or a policy review by the Administration. A fourth bill — H.R. 4686 — proposes investing in UMR-IWW ecosystem restoration using an existing Environmental Management Program, without authorizing navigation improvements. This report compares the bills with each other and with the Corps' preferred plan. The report will be updated as warranted.

Contents

Most Recent Developments	1
UMR-IWW Background	2
Navigation Conditions	2
Ecosystem Decline	3
UMR-IWW Feasibility Study Evolution	4
Final Feasibility Report	5
Project Development and Authorization Process	6
Standard Process	6
UMR-IWW Feasibility Report	7
Proposed Legislation	7
Navigation Investments	8
Corps Navigation Plan	9
Adaptive Implementation	9
First Increment	10
Environmental Mitigation	10
Comparison of Legislation and Corps Navigation Plan	10
Ecosystem Restoration Investments	12
Corps Ecosystem Restoration Plan	12
15-Year Restoration Increment	13
Comparison of Legislation and Corps Restoration Plan	14
H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773	14
H.R. 4686	18
Conclusions	18

List of Tables

Table 1. Comparison of Corps Navigation Plan and H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773	11
Table 2. Comparison of Corps Restoration Plan and H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773	16

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Most Recent Developments

In September 2004, the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) released its *Final Integrated Feasibility Report and Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the UMR-IWW System Navigation Feasibility Study*.¹ It lays out a 50-year plan for combined navigation investments (\$2.4 billion) and ecosystem restoration investments (\$5.3 billion) for the Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway (UMR-IWW). From the 50-year plan, the Corps recommends authorization of a first increment of investments — \$1.88 billion for seven new locks and small-scale navigation measures, and \$1.46 billion for ecosystem restoration.

Three bills in the 108th Congress — H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773 — would authorize many of the UMR-IWW investments recommended by the Corps; they would authorize \$1.73 billion for navigation, and \$1.46 billion for ecosystem restoration. No action has been taken on H.R. 4785 or S. 2470. On August 25, 2004, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee reported S. 2773 — the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2004. WRDA is the traditional legislative vehicle for authorizing Corps projects. The House passed a WRDA 2003 (H.R. 2557) without a UMR-IWW authorization on September 26, 2003 (before the Corps' UMR-IWW feasibility report was available). WRDA legislative action is tracked in CRS Issue Brief IB10133, *Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) and Other Army Corps of Engineers Legislation*, coordinated by Nicole T. Carter.

A fourth bill — H.R. 4686, the Mississippi River Protection and Restoration Act of 2004 — would expand ecosystem restoration under the existing Environmental Management Program (EMP) for the Upper Mississippi River System (UMRS); it would not authorize navigation investments. No action has been taken on H.R. 4686. For more information, see CRS Issue Brief IB10133, *Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) and Other Army Corps of Engineers Legislation*, coordinated by Nicole T. Carter.

¹ Hereafter referred to as Corps, *Final Feasibility Report and PEIS*. Available at [http://www2.mvr.usace.army.mil/umr-iwwsns/documents/Main_Report_Final.pdf].

UMR-IWW Background

Navigation Conditions

The UMR-IWW is a 1,200 mile, 9-foot-deep navigation channel created by 37 lock and dam sites and thousands of channel training structures. The UMR-IWW makes commercial navigation possible between Minneapolis and St. Louis and along the length of the Illinois Waterway. Five of the nation's top agricultural production states — Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin — have relied on the UMR-IWW system as a principal conduit for export-bound agricultural products — mostly bulk corn and soybeans. The low-cost, high-volume UMR-IWW system has provided an important competitive advantage for U.S. agricultural products in international markets. Commercial users of the waterway argue that this competitiveness is in danger because of increasing transit delays.

Most of the lock and dam infrastructure of the UMR-IWW navigation system were built by the Corps in the 1930s. These 600-foot locks require the prevalent 1,100-foot barge tows to split in half and pass through in two steps. This decoupling process contributes to wait times at some locks; the Corps reports that the UMR-IWW system has over half (19 of 36) of the most delayed locks of the country's inland waterways.² Commercial users advocate that the federal government should expand lock capacity by building new 1,200-foot locks parallel to the existing 600-foot locks (keeping both operational). They argue that commercial UMR-IWW barge operators have been paying a fuel tax into the Inland Waterway Trust Fund (IWTF)³ for making this type of infrastructure investment. In contrast, a taxpayer advocacy group — Taxpayers for Common Sense — and some environmental groups have argued that inexpensive small-scale measures like traffic scheduling, congestion tolls, and switchboats could manage demand and reduce lockage delays; and unlike new locks that will take years to design and build, small-scale measures can be implemented quickly at a fraction of the cost.⁴ Navigation investment supporters argue that in practice the usefulness of small-scale measures is limited. Some

² Corps, *Final Feasibility Report and PEIS*, p. 57.

³ The IWTF is funded by a 20 cent per gallon diesel tax paid by barge operators of vessels engaged in commercial transportation on designated waterways. The IWTF pays half the cost of new construction and major rehabilitation of barge infrastructure. In recent years, collections have exceeded expenditures, so there is a growing unspent balance in the fund. For further information on the IWTF, see CRS Report RL32192, *Harbors and Inland Waterways: An Overview of Federal Financing*, by Nicole T. Carter and John F. Frittelli.

⁴ *Twice-Cooked Pork: The Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway Navigation Study*, a report prepared by a coalition of interest groups in opposition to large-scale lock expansion; available at [<http://www.iatp.org/enviroag/>]. Hereafter referred to as *Twice-Cooked Pork*. The National Taxpayers Union has also spoken out against the navigation investments: [<http://www.taxpayer.net/TCS/PressReleases/2004/5-20mississippi.htm>]. In response to *Twice-Cooked Pork*, Midwest Area River Coalition 2000 (MARC 2000) — “a coalition of shippers, carriers, agricultural, industrial, environmental and government interests to promote Midwest economic growth by responsibly developing and improving the UMR-IWW” — released a report available at [http://www.marc2000.org/Documents/Twice_Cooked_Pork_vs_Reality_Final.pdf].

environmental groups are also concerned that additional stress, caused by construction activities and increases in barge traffic above current levels, could accelerate ecosystem decline. (For a discussion of the environmental impacts of incremental navigation improvements and traffic on the UMR-IWW, see CRS Report RL32470, *Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway Navigation Expansion: An Agricultural Transportation and Environmental Context*, coordinated by Randy Schnepf.)

Opponents of expanding capacity contend that the improvements are not economically justified based on current agricultural and transportation trends and costs.⁵ They argue that steady barge traffic on the UMR-IWW, since the mid-1980s, indicates that foreign demand for U.S. feedstuffs is stagnant. Navigation proponents counter that barge traffic has been steady recently *because* of delays; that is, delays are forcing grain shippers to switch to alternate transportation modes to ensure timely arrival at downriver processing plants or gulf ports. Navigation supporters cite that, since the late 1940s, the UMR-IWW has experienced substantial traffic growth — from less than 10 million metric tons in the mid-1940s to more than 80 million metric tons in the 1990s. For an analysis of the historic trends and the prospect for future traffic, see CRS Report RL32470, *Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway Navigation Expansion: An Agricultural Transportation and Environmental Context*, coordinated by Randy Schnepf.

Although 1,200-foot locks are expected to reduce current waiting times at locks, they are not expected to eliminate all lock delays, because decoupling is only one cause of delay. Lock delays also occur because of closures for operation and maintenance and the variability in demand — more than one boat arriving at the same time results in a queue, and the seasonality of crop harvesting assures strong autumn demand. The Corps has not published an estimate of the proportion of delays expected to be eliminated by new locks.

Ecosystem Decline

The Upper Mississippi River System (UMRS) — an ecosystem defined as including the UMR-IWW navigation system, and the aquatic and terrestrial habitats and species that are critically important to the river floodplain ecosystem⁶ — is losing the habitat and habitat diversity that support the ecosystem's diverse species. Two structural elements — dams and locks that facilitate navigation, and flood reduction levees — have changed the riverine ecosystem's structure and functions, altering basic processes and habitats by modifying water levels and their fluctuations. The UMRS provides habitat and food to at least 485 species of birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and fish, including 10 federally listed endangered or threatened species and 100 state-listed threatened or endangered species. It is a critical migration corridor for 40% of North America's waterfowl and shorebirds, and home to at least 118 fish species and almost 50 freshwater mussels species.

⁵ *Twice-Cooked Pork*.

⁶ The lateral boundaries of the UMRS are defined by the full extent of the floodplains — toe-of-bluff to toe-of-bluff, varying from 300 to 500 meters (1,000 feet to 1,600 feet) wide. Corps, *Final Feasibility Report and PEIS*, p. 113.

In WRDA 1986 (P.L. 99-662), Congress declared the UMRS a nationally significant ecosystem and a nationally significant commercial navigation system, and created the Environmental Management Program (EMP) for conducting habitat rehabilitation/enhancement projects and long-term resource monitoring for the UMRS. The ecosystem encompasses four National Fish and Wildlife Refuges, and three national parks lie within or immediately adjacent to the river system. The UMRS ecosystem also is viewed as significant because of its recreational use and the economic value of recreation. Annually, there are 12 million daily visits for recreation in the UMRS; boating, sightseeing, sports fishing, hunting, and trapping are some of the popular recreational uses.⁷ It is estimated that recreational activities generate \$1.2 billion and over 18,000 jobs annually.⁸

According to the Corps, current annual environmental investments — \$33.9 million, on average, in federal and state funds — are inadequate to prevent continued degradation. Side channels, backwater, and wetlands are filling in with sediment. The ecosystem is also experiencing a loss of connectivity of the floodplain to the river, impeded fish migration, loss of island habitat, and loss of native plant community diversity and abundance. Although the navigation system and levees significantly altered conditions, they are not the only stressors causing decline. The Mississippi River and Illinois River have a long history of impaired water quality largely caused by contamination from agricultural, industrial, residential, and municipal sources,⁹ as well as increased sedimentation and altered runoff patterns from land use changes.

Environmental groups seek investments in ecosystem restoration that will support a mosaic of habitats and river management that more closely resembles a natural hydrograph and river-floodplain connectivity. Some cite the loss of migratory birds in the areas of the Illinois River and the Middle and Lower Mississippi River as examples of a possible outcome if investments are not made. Environmental groups want to reverse ecosystem decline and to increase the services and benefits provided by a healthy ecosystem (e.g., recreational uses).

UMR-IWW Feasibility Study Evolution

To inform the congressional decision on whether to authorize UMR-IWW investments, the Corps conducted a feasibility study.¹⁰ The Corps' feasibility study, which began in 1993 to investigate the long-run navigation needs of the UMR-IWW, has been the subject of much controversy. In February 2000, a Corps economist approached the U.S. Office of Special Counsel, an independent federal investigative and prosecutorial agency that protects government whistleblowers, and contended that the Corps manipulated a cost-benefit analysis to support UMR-IWW lock improvements.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁰ For more information see CRS Congressional Distribution Memorandum, *UMR-IWW Project History*, by Kyna Powers, May 3, 2004.

The feasibility study was temporarily halted while the allegations were investigated by the Army Inspector General, and available study documents were reviewed by the National Research Council (NRC) of the National Academy of Sciences. The Inspector General's investigation found no incidents of fraud or waste; it did reveal serious misconduct and improprieties with the study and suggested an institutional bias that favored large-scale projects.¹¹ The NRC pointed out several flaws in the economic modeling methodology and the data used for navigation estimates, including overly optimistic river traffic projections.¹² It also criticized the Corps for limiting the study's environmental analyses to incremental effects of expanding navigation capacity. In response, in 2001, the Corps reformulated the economic analysis and added an ecosystem restoration component to the study.

The NRC continues to review the study. A second NRC panel produced a report in December 2003 that reviews the reformulated study,¹³ and another report in October 2004 that comments on an April 2004 draft Corps feasibility report (which is similar to the final feasibility report).¹⁴ The NRC suggested in its reports that, until small-scale measures were investigated and implemented where feasible, it would be impracticable to evaluate the benefits of new locks and lock extensions. Following on the earlier reports, the October 2004 report found: "Economic feasibility for any of the navigation alternatives has therefore not been demonstrated;" that NRC panel concluded that "many of the flaws and omissions in this study can be corrected in the course of implementation by the application of adaptive management principles."¹⁵

Final Feasibility Report. In September 2004, the Corps released a final feasibility report based on the results of the reformulated study. It recommends a 50-year plan for combined navigation efficiency and ecosystem restoration investments. The Corps proposes authorization of a first increment of measures as well as a dual-purpose (navigation and ecosystem restoration) management of the UMR-IWW. The Corps' navigation improvement plan would cost an estimated \$2.4 billion over 50 years, while the ecosystem restoration plan would cost an estimated \$5.3 billion over 50 years. The Corps recommends that Congress authorize a first increment of the navigation measures at \$1.88 billion and a first 15-year increment of ecosystem restoration measures at \$1.46 billion. The Corps has not implemented small-scale measures as the NRC suggested, but has evaluated them as part of the reformulated

¹¹ U.S. Dept. of the Army, *U.S. Army Inspector General Agency Report of Investigation (case 00-019)* (Washington, DC: December 2000).

¹² NRC, *Inland Navigation System Planning: The Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2001).

¹³ NRC, *Review of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Upper Mississippi-Illinois Waterway Restructured Study: Interim Report* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2003). Hereafter referred to as December 2003 NRC report.

¹⁴ The prepublication version of the October 2004 report, *Review of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Upper Mississippi-Illinois Waterway feasibility Study: Second Report* is available at [<http://books.nap.edu/catalog/11109.html>]. Hereafter referred to as October 2004 NRC report.

¹⁵ October 2004 NRC report, p.8.

study. Some small-scale measures are included in the Corps' recommendation for navigation investments. A Chief's report on his recommendation for the project is expected by the end of 2004.

In addition to supporting navigation and ecosystem restoration investments, the Corps recommends creating a structure for UMR-IWW investments and operations consisting of three basic elements:

- adding ecosystem restoration as a UMR-IWW project purpose, creating a dual-purpose navigation and restoration authority,
- approving a combined navigation and ecosystem restoration plan as a framework, and
- adaptively implementing navigation investments and adaptively managing ecosystem restoration investments.¹⁶

According to the Corps, these three elements combined would allow the agency to proceed with operational changes and near-term investments for navigation and ecosystem restoration. Investments would be part of a long-term river management framework that minimizes risk by establishing a process to incorporate acquired information into ongoing decision-making and phased authorizations.

Three bills — H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773 — would authorize most navigation and ecosystem restoration activities recommended by the Corps; a fourth bill, H.R. 4686, would authorize expansion of ecosystem restoration under an existing program, without authorizing navigation investments. The next section of this report discusses the standard project development and authorization process for Corps projects, and how the UMR-IWW feasibility report and authorizations in H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773 differ from the standard process. That section is followed by two other sections: one that compares the Corps' navigation plan to proposed legislation, and one that compares the restoration plan to proposed legislation.

Project Development and Authorization Process

Standard Process

For most Corps projects to be eligible for construction appropriations, Congress must authorize the project, typically in a WRDA bill. Once authorized, commencement of construction-related work must await appropriations. Appropriations are generally made in the annual Energy and Water Development

¹⁶ Part of the Corps definition of adaptive management is:

An approach to natural resources management that acknowledges the risk and uncertainty of ecosystem restoration and allows for modification of restoration measures to optimize performance. The process of implementing policy decisions as scientifically driven management experiments that test predictions and assumptions in management plans, using the resulting information to improve the plans. (*sic*) (Corps, *Final Feasibility Report and PEIS*, p. 611)

Appropriations Act. Although some projects may be authorized and received appropriations simultaneously in an appropriations bill, this has not been the norm.

The formal Corps project development and authorization process typically has Congress authorizing a project based on a report by the Corps' Chief of Engineers (i.e., a Chief's report) that has been reviewed by the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).¹⁷ The Chief's report contains a final feasibility report (including studies of engineering feasibility and analyses of benefits and costs), environmental studies, and the Chief's recommendation for the project. In recent years, Congress increasingly has authorized projects based on informational copies of the Chief's report before complete reviews by the Assistant Secretary and OMB; however, a majority of projects are still authorized after full executive branch review. Since WRDA 1996, Congress also has increasingly authorized Corps projects before a Chief's report is completed; these authorizations generally have been contingent upon completion of a favorable Chief's report by the end of the calendar year.

UMR-IWW Feasibility Report

The Corps' UMR-IWW feasibility report is distinct from the typical feasibility report. The Corps usually recommends authorization of an entire project that it has analyzed and compared to alternatives. Because the UMR-IWW is an extensive navigation system, the Corps analyzes and compares alternative 50-year packages of projects for navigation and ecosystem restoration, and it recommends that Congress approve the combined plans as a framework and authorize a subset of initial projects, with the implication that the remaining projects in the 50-year plan would be authorized later.¹⁸ The subset of projects was not analyzed as a stand-alone plan. For example, the Corps feasibility report does not have a benefit-cost analysis for the first increment of navigation activities separate from the analysis of the 50-year plan. The report also does not present a cost-effectiveness analysis for the first increment of ecosystem restoration projects.

Proposed Legislation

The authorization of UMR-IWW investments in H.R. 4686, S. 2470, and S. 2773 is also distinct from the standard project development and authorization process. The bills include no requirement for a Chief's report (or a review by the Administration) to be completed before authorization would take effect. Most project authorization language in WRDA bills state that a project is to be carried out in accordance with the Chief's report, rather than specifying authorized activities. The bills specify navigation activities to be authorized, without referencing any report

¹⁷ For more information on the Corps' project development and authorization process, see CRS Report RL32604, *Army Corps of Engineers Water Resources Activities: Authorization and Appropriations*, by Nicole T. Carter.

¹⁸ A similar framework approach was used for the Corps' first large-scale restoration effort in the Florida Everglades; WRDA 2000 (P.L. 106-541) approved the final feasibility report as a framework, authorized a few specific projects under the framework, and established a process for developing and authorizing additional projects.

and not subject to any larger framework or plan. In contrast, the bills would authorize ecosystem restoration measures “in accordance with the general framework outlined” in the feasibility report.

Supporters of exceptions from the standard process generally argue that the completion of a Chief’s report and the Administration’s reviews and the timing of authorizing legislation are not always synchronized, and that exceptions provide the flexibility to bridge the two schedules when most of the Corps’ analysis is already complete. These differences from the standard process may be viewed negatively by environmental and taxpayer groups because of the controversy and disagreement over the UMR-IWW study and its conclusions. These groups have been critical of other exceptions to the Corps’ standard process; they contend that authorizing without a Chief’s report and Administration review rushes projects through critical development stages, congressional decisions are made with incomplete information, and the Corps and its Chief may be pressured to make favorable recommendations.

Navigation Investments

The analysis performed to justify federal investment in navigation improvements in the UMR-IWW feasibility report is atypical; the analysis had to account for a complex set of risks and uncertainties resulting from a 50-year planning horizon for the extensive UMR-IWW system. For the *Final Feasibility Report and PEIS*, the Corps used a scenario-based approach, rather than forecasting navigation demand over 50 years (which the Corps was doing prior to the criticism in 2000 and 2001). The scenario approach examines UMR-IWW movements for five traffic scenarios based on differing world trade, crop area, crop yield, and consumption patterns.

The Corps uses the scenarios to arrive at a preferred navigation plan and to make three general findings. First, no single navigation alternative was a clear best choice across a range of economic conditions.¹⁹ Second, the preferred navigation alternative depends on two variables: (1) traffic forecasts derived from future trade scenarios, and (2) price sensitivity of shippers.²⁰ Third, “the risks are high if no action is taken and high traffic occurs. Risks are also high if a large investment is made and increases in traffic do not materialize.”²¹ Stated another way, the Corps found every alternative (including no action) to contain risk in the face of an uncertain future. Meeting a fundamental criterion for federal involvement — that national economic development benefits exceed costs — depends on what the future holds. For example according to the Corps’ analysis, if UMR-IWW traffic continues at the fairly constant level of the last 20 years, costs of large-scale measures would likely exceed benefits.²² If navigation traffic on the system increases (i.e., follows the

¹⁹ Corps, *Final Feasibility Report and PEIS*, pp. x, 437-438, and 493.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 462 and 493.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 493.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 458.

longer 50-year growth trend), benefits probably will exceed costs.²³ These findings are useful for understanding why proceeding with navigation capacity expansion remains controversial. For a discussion of the difference of opinion on the urgency of new locks, the feasibility of using alternatives to new locks for reducing delays, and the confidence level in the Corps analysis, see CRS Report RL32470, *Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway Navigation Expansion: An Agricultural Transportation and Environmental Context*, coordinated by Randy Schnepf.

Corps Navigation Plan

Adaptive Implementation. The *Final Feasibility Report and PEIS* states that sufficient analysis has been completed to support an initial navigation investment to be implemented using an adaptive approach that minimizes risk by controlling the magnitude of investment decisions.²⁴ The Corps is recommending authorization of an initial set of navigation investments from its 50-year navigation plan, including seven new 1,200-foot locks; authorization for the remaining navigation investments, which consist primarily of extending five 600-foot locks to 1,200 feet, would be sought in later legislation. To support this adaptive approach, the Corps recommends continued study and monitoring of UMR-IWW navigation to produce the data to feed into an adaptive implementation approach.

In another departure from standard practice, the Corps recommends that the seven new locks be reconsidered after congressional authorization, as additional information becomes available. The Corps would transmit reports to the Administration and Congress containing acquired information. First, the Corps would produce a notification report at the end of the first phase of lock design, and before the award of a construction contract. The notification report would present all new information resulting from monitoring river traffic and markets, and results of any improved models and analysis. The Corps plans to break up preconstruction engineering and design work for the seven new locks into two segments — first the design work on three locks, followed by the design work on the remaining four locks. The design work for the first three locks is expected to take three years following initiation of appropriations, so the Corps anticipates a notification report in 2008 if appropriations are received starting in 2005. At that point, the Corps estimates that it would have spent \$30 million on pre-construction engineering and design for the first three lock sites. The second report would come five to seven years into implementation (i.e., 2010 to 2012) when the Corps submits a reevaluation report upon the development and use of “new and widely accepted models”; the report would conclude with a recommendation to Congress on whether to continue, stop, or delay lock construction underway.

A third report would be an updated feasibility report for the 50-year plan evaluating investments in a second increment of measures; the second increment of navigation measures would consist primarily of five lock extensions upstream of the

²³ Ibid., p. 459.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 493.

new locks on the Mississippi River. This report is anticipated 16 years into implementation (i.e., around 2021).

First Increment. The Corps' 50-year navigation plan consists of small-scale measures (structural and nonstructural, including switchboats²⁵) and large-scale improvements — seven new locks and five lock extensions. The plan would have a “first cost” (i.e., design and construction costs) of \$2.4 billion plus annual switchboat costs of \$18 million. In the *Final Feasibility Report and PEIS*, the Corps recommends that Congress approve the 50-year plan as a framework and authorize a first increment of \$1.88 billion (to be paid 50% from federal general revenue funds and 50% from the Inland Waterways Trust Fund, consistent with standard policy for inland waterway projects). The first increment would include seven new locks and small-scale measures for use during lock construction. The seven new locks would be 1,200-foot locks parallel to existing 600-foot locks.

The \$1.88 billion authorization proposed by the Corps would cover the first costs for authorized navigation measures; like most Corps authorizations, the authorized amount would not reflect operation and maintenance (O&M) expenses. O&M for inland waterways is 100% a federal responsibility. The O&M for the recommended navigation measures would be \$7.8 million annually; the federal government would be responsible for this amount as well the \$115 to \$126 million annually spent on O&M of the existing UMR-IWW navigation system.

The Corps estimates that it will take 13 years for each lock to proceed from the start of pre-construction engineering and design to completion of construction, if fully funded. The first three of the seven new locks would be complete at the earliest by 2019; the remaining four locks would be started three years later and completed no earlier than 2022.

Environmental Mitigation. The *Final Feasibility Report and PEIS* assesses and sets out a process and specific measures for mitigating impacts directly associated with the navigation improvements in its preferred navigation alternative. The Corps concludes that the impacts of large-scale UMR-IWW measures can be mitigated; it states that by using mitigation, the net effect from both increased traffic and site-specific impacts would be no loss to the five principal areas of concern — fisheries, submerged aquatic plants, backwaters, secondary channels, and historic properties.²⁶

Comparison of Legislation and Corps Navigation Plan

As recommended by the Corps, H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773 would authorize seven new locks and small-scale and non-structural measures (see **Table**

²⁵ Switchboats would be used to assist tows, by managing the second half of their hauls as they move the first half through the 600-foot locks, resulting in a shorter lockage time. Switchboats would be employed as hired vessels permanently stationed on both the upstream and downstream sides of a lock.

²⁶ Corps, *Final Feasibility Report and PEIS*, p. 419. The Corps has not established specific mitigation actions; instead, it identifies potential mitigation measures for each river reach.

1). The language in the three bills emphasizes that IWTF funds come from a tax on commercial waterways users. The navigation sections of H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773 make no reference to the Corps' preferred plan as a long-term framework. In short, it appears that the bills would authorize construction of specified activities, without committing to a long-term management framework.

Table 1 identifies other differences between the Corps' recommendation and the three bills. These include: (1) the bills do not include an adaptive implementation process; (2) the bills do not include a continued monitoring and study provision, except for development and testing of a lock appointment scheduling system; and (3) the bills require the Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) to provide switchboats for five years (instead of the 15 years recommended by the Corps). In effect, the bills rely on the continued involvement of Congress through the appropriations process, rather than the Corps' adaptive approach and continued study and monitoring.

Table 1. Comparison of Corps Navigation Plan and H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773

	Corps' Preferred Navigation Alternative	H.R. 4785/S. 2470/S. 2773
Reference to Feasibility Report or Plan	Dual-purpose plan approved as a framework.	No comparable provision.
Adaptive Implementation	15-year process with three reporting requirements.	No comparable provision.
First Increment. Small-Scale and Non-Structural Measures	\$218 million (50% IWTF and 50% general funds (GF)), including mitigation.	\$48 million (50% IWTF and 50% GF), not including mitigation.
Mooring Facilities	At 7 locks.	At 7 locks.
Switchboats	At 5 locks for 15 years during construction of 7 new locks.	At 5 locks for 5 years.
First Increment. Large-Scale Measures	\$1,660 million (50% from IWTF and 50% GF), <i>including</i> mitigation.	\$1,460 million (50% IWTF and 50% GF), <i>not</i> including mitigation.
New Locks	Seven 1,200-foot locks.	Seven 1,200-foot locks.
Mitigation	Mitigation is incorporated directly into authorized amounts for the new locks and small-scale and non-structural measures.	\$200 million (50% from IWTF/50% general funds) for new locks and small-scale and non-structural measures.
Continued Study and Monitoring	5 activities, including development of a lock appointment scheduling system.	1 activity - development and testing of a lock appointment scheduling system.
Total Navigation Authorizations	\$1.878 billion (50% from IWTF and 50% GF).	\$1.728 billion (50% from IWTF and 50% GF).

Source: Congressional Research Service.

Ecosystem Restoration Investments

The Corps' Upper Mississippi River System restoration plan is unique because the investments are aimed at benefitting a diverse set of species. Most of the Corps' other environmental investments have been for project *mitigation*, often targeted at specific threatened or endangered species. For the UMRS, the Corps is proposing a large-scale *restoration* effort that is not directed at specific species, but at providing habitat and habitat diversity to benefit populations of multiple native species in situ. (For a more detailed discussion of the ecosystem restoration proposal, see CRS Report RL32630, *Upper Mississippi River System: Proposals to Restore an Inland Waterway's Ecosystem*, by Kyna Powers and Nicole T. Carter.) The Environmental Management Program for the UMRS, authorized in WRDA 1986, has allowed the Corps to test the impacts of measures similar to those proposed for the UMRS. However, since large-scale implementation of these measures may produce uncertain outcomes, the Corps is recommending an adaptive management approach. Since the UMRS restoration plan is among the first large-scale restoration efforts being planned across the country, it raises numerous unanswered policy questions (that are not addressed in this report), including:

- What distinguishes ecosystem restoration from mitigation for past and ongoing damages of navigation projects?
- What qualifies as restoration? For example, is a system that needs regular intervention, such as dredging, “restored”?
- Is restoration a feasible goal for a waterway managed for intensive commercial navigation? Is dual-purpose management for ecosystem restoration and navigation possible for a high-use commercial waterway?
- How should federal appropriations be distributed among the universe of ecosystem restoration projects nationally? For example, how does restoration of the UMRS rank compared to the restorations of the Florida Everglades, Coastal Louisiana, and the California Bay Delta?

Corps Ecosystem Restoration Plan

The final feasibility report recommends an ecosystem restoration plan for combating the environmental damage resulting from ongoing navigation O&M and other factors degrading the UMRS ecosystem. It recommends a long-term (50-year) restoration framework, an adaptive management approach, and authorization of a 15-year first increment of activities. The restoration goals are:²⁷

- maintain viable populations of native species in situ;
- represent all native ecosystem types across their natural range of variation;
- restore and maintain evolutionary and ecological processes (e.g., disturbance regimes, hydrologic processes, nutrient cycles, etc.); and
- integrate human use and occupancy within these constraints.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 171.

The Corps limits its ecosystem restoration plan to the navigation project and study, and to addressing the cumulative impacts of operations of federal projects and other stressors without reducing the benefits of existing federal projects. As such, restoration measures are constrained because they cannot harm navigation, and they are limited to the UMR-IWW and its floodplain (rather than the larger watershed). For example, dramatic water level changes that could produce substantial restoration benefits are not in the Corps' plan because they would interfere with navigation. Another consequence of limiting restoration to the navigation project and study is that some of the stressors leading to degradation are excluded from the preferred plan. The recommended UMRS restoration plan does not include changes to land use practices, flood protection practices that isolate the river from its floodplain on a large-scale, or significant alterations to navigation infrastructure. For example, the Corps' plan recommends backwater dredging measures; dredging addresses the symptom of elevated sedimentation, but not the land use practices that can cause it. Directly changing land use is outside the scope of the navigation study and navigation project. Because only some of the stressors causing ecosystem degradation are managed under the Corps plan, not all of the ecosystem's natural river processes would be restored, resulting in the need for regular human intervention to obtain some restoration benefits.

15-Year Restoration Increment. In the final feasibility report, the Corps proposes that Congress authorize an initial 15-year, \$1.46 billion increment of the Corps' 50-year \$5.3 billion ecosystem restoration plan. The \$1.46 billion would cover the first costs (i.e., design and construction) for the authorized activities, breaking down as \$1.33 billion (93%) federal and \$0.13 billion (7%) nonfederal. This cost-share arrangement is unusual. For most Corps' ecosystem restoration projects, a cost-share of 65% federal and 35% nonfederal is applied to the project.²⁸ The cost-share arrangement proposed by the Corps for the UMR-IWW has drawn attention because it distinguishes between activities that have the 65%/35% split and activities that will be 100% federal. In general, the 100% federal components address impacts of the existing 9-foot navigation project or are on federal land.²⁹

According to the Corps, measures in the 15-year increment were selected to provide (1) the best return on investment, (2) the best gains in habitat diversity, and (3) additional knowledge that will facilitate implementing the 50-year plan.³⁰ The Corps also favored measures for which planning, design, construction, and monitoring could occur during the 15-year window. However, some organizations contend that 15 years will be insufficient to demonstrate substantial improvements.

²⁸ Currently, the Corps has authorization to lead only one large-scale restoration effort — the Florida Everglades restoration. The Everglades restoration was split 50% federal and 50% nonfederal. The Everglades ecosystem was also harmed by operations of federal projects and encompasses extensive federal lands. For information on Everglades restoration, see CRS Report RS20702, *South Florida Ecosystem Restoration and the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan*, by Nicole T. Carter and Pervaze A. Sheikh.

²⁹ The 100% federal components include any project (1) below the ordinary high water mark or in a connected backwater; (2) that modifies navigation structures or operations; or (3) located on federal land.

³⁰ Corps, *Final Feasibility Report and PEIS*, pp. 511-512.

Unlike the analysis of the 50-year ecosystem restoration options, the final report does not analyze in detail the ecosystem benefits expected from the 15-year increment; it also does not present alternative 15-year increments, or a cost-effectiveness analysis of the 15-year increment.

The recommended 15-year increment includes 225 measures, from the 1,010 measures in the 50-year plan. The 225 measures are grouped into three main categories of activities:

- *Fish Passage and Dam Operations.* Fish passage construction at four dams and fish passage planning and design at two dams (\$209 million), and new dam operating procedures (and related land acquisition or easements) at two dams (\$41 million) (\$250 million total — 100% federal).
- *Programmatic Restoration Authority.* Programmatic authority to implement island building, floodplain restoration, water level management, backwater restoration, side channel restoration, wing dam/dike alternation and shoreline protection (\$935 million total, not to exceed \$25 million/measure — 100% federal).
- *Land Acquisition.* Land acquisition of 35,000 acres from willing sellers, for floodplain connectivity and wetland and riparian habitat protection and restoration (\$277 million total — 65% federal).³¹

The \$935 million in programmatic restoration authorization includes \$136 million for adaptive management and \$136 million for restoration monitoring and evaluation. The \$1.46 billion does not include O&M expenses. O&M for ecosystem restoration for Corps projects is typically 100% a nonfederal responsibility. Because some of the projects would be managed by federal agencies, their O&M would be a federal responsibility. The O&M costs (which will be incurred over the 50-year planning horizon) for the 15-year increment are estimated at \$61.5 million, with an expected split of \$9.6 million federal and \$51.9 nonfederal.

Comparison of Legislation and Corps Restoration Plan

Three bills — H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773 — are largely similar to each other and use many of the Corps recommendations; they authorize the same projects, the same cost-share arrangement, and the same total authorization of \$1.46 billion. In contrast, H.R. 4686 would authorize an increase in UMRS ecosystem restoration investments under the existing EMP, separate from navigation investments.

H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773. Although H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773 would require that restoration be implemented in accordance with the general framework outlined in the *Final Feasibility Report and PEIS*, there are some differences between the Corps' 15-year increment and the proposed authorizing language in the three bills. (See **Table 2.**) For example, the Corps recommends adaptive management of the ecosystem restoration plan, but the bills make no mention of adaptive management. Instead, they require some complementary

³¹ Ibid., p. 522.

measures. They require an ecosystem restoration implementation report by July 2005, and every four years thereafter; the report is to include baselines, benchmarks, goals, and priorities for restoration projects and to measure the progress in meeting goals. The bills would also authorize a science panel, which was one of 12 elements of the adaptive management strategy outlined in the final feasibility report.³² Because the bills do not specifically authorize the adaptive management approach, it is uncertain if the Corps will have the authority to implement the \$136 million adaptive management program and the complementary \$136 million monitoring and evaluation that the agency recommends. Similarly, the Corps recommends adding ecosystem restoration as a project purpose;³³ bill language would require the Corps, “consistent with requirements to avoid any adverse effects on navigation,” to modify UMR-IWW operations to address cumulative environmental impacts and improve ecological integrity and to carry out ecosystem restoration projects. The bills do not explicitly add ecosystem restoration as a project purpose of the UMR-IWW. How managing for both navigation and restoration will play out remains to be seen.

Another distinction is that H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773 would authorize the lump sum of \$1.46 billion with one primary limitation that land acquisition be limited to \$35 million annually. In the final feasibility report, the Corps makes no recommendations on an annual limitation on land acquisition, instead it recommends a cap of 35,000 acres on land acquisition. The final report had provided a breakdown of the \$1.46 billion between three categories of restoration activities — fish passage and dam operations, programmatic restoration authority, and land acquisition.

³² Ibid., p. 516.

³³ Ibid., p. 491.

**Table 2. Comparison of Corps Restoration Plan and
H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773**

	Corps' Preferred Plan	H.R. 4785/S. 2470/S. 2773
Ecosystem Restoration Authority	Ecosystem restoration as a project purpose.	Requires that UMR-IWW operations be modified to address cumulative environmental impacts and improve ecological integrity consistent with requirements to avoid any adverse effects on navigation.
Reference to Feasibility Report or Combined Plan	Combined plan approved as a framework.	No language approving the report or plan as a framework; however, the language requires restoration projects to be carried out in accordance with the general framework outlined in the final feasibility report.
Initial 15-Year Authorized Activities	(a) Fish Passage and Dam Operations, (b) Programmatic Restoration Authority for multiple project types, (c) Land Acquisition limited to 35,000 acres.	List of 15 project types to be carried out in accordance with the general framework outlined in the final feasibility report.
Adaptive Management	Corps recommends an adaptive management strategy that includes organizations (River Management Council, Science Panel, and River Management Teams), systemic studies, & evaluation of restoration measures.	Establishes an advisory panel to provide guidance in the development of each quadrennial report. (See Continued study and Monitoring for complementary provisions.)
Continued Study and Monitoring	Report after 15 years.	Implementation report by June 30, 2005 and every 4 years after that. Reports to include baselines, benchmarks, and priorities, and measures in progress to meet the objectives.
Cost Share	Mixture of 100% federal elements, & ones shared 65% federal & 35% nonfederal.	Same as recommended by the Corps.
Total Ecosystem Restoration Authorizations (Est. Federal & Nonfederal)	\$1.46 billion (\$1.33 billion & \$0.13 billion)	\$1.46 billion (\$1.33 billion & \$0.13 billion)
Appropriations Limitation	No comparable provision.	Land acquisition limited to \$35 million in federal funds used for land acquisition.

Source: Congressional Research Service.

The major difference among the three bills is that S. 2773 includes three sections that are not in H.R. 4785 and S. 2470 — restoration project design requirements, linked navigation and ecosystem restoration progress, and project ranking based on restoring natural river processes.

Project Design. S. 2773 requires that before an individual restoration project can begin construction, the Secretary shall establish restoration performance measures (including a baseline indicator) and target goals. The design of these projects must also include a monitoring plan for the performance measures, including a timeline for project completion. The provision appears to be aimed at addressing concerns over what would be achieved both under the first increment of authorized activities and the longer, 50-year plan, and when restoration will be complete. This provision is complementary to the Corps' recommendation for an adaptive management approach which requires establishing baselines and performing monitoring to incorporate new information into on-going investments.

Linked Progress. S. 2773 requires the Corps to establish milestones for the ecosystem restoration and navigation projects. It also requires the Secretary of the Army to determine if the projects are being carried out at "comparable rates." If the projects are not moving toward completion at a comparable rate, annual funding would be adjusted to promote comparable progress. The provision appears to be an attempt to address concerns about ecosystem restoration investments being outpaced by navigation investments. Some environmental groups are willing to accept new locks if ecosystem restoration is also authorized and funded; they want investments in restoration and navigation linked. They fear that if the two are not linked, ecosystem restoration may be authorized, but receive minimal appropriations. Navigation and agricultural interests have expressed their dissatisfaction with wedding navigation and restoration progress; they consider navigation and ecosystem restoration investments as separable. They do not want navigation construction slowed down due to constrained federal appropriations for ecosystem restoration, in light of the multiple multi-billion dollar, large-scale restoration projects already underway or under development nationally. They also contend that linking may delay progress of lock construction, thus extending the environmental and traffic disturbances caused by construction. Linked progress may ultimately be a political question of how Congress wants to direct its appropriations.

Project Ranking. S. 2773 requires the Secretary of the Army to develop a ranking system for restoration projects that emphasizes projects that restore natural river processes. Project ranking based on restoring natural river processes appears to be an attempt to promote projects that trigger "self-repair and self-maintenance over large areas at relatively modest cost."³⁴ This provision would likely give priority to water level management and other dam alterations, floodplain measures such as levee modifications and removals, and alteration of river training structures such as wing dams and dikes. The impact of this provision on the implementation of the Corps' final plan is uncertain. It would give priority to a single aspect of a project, rather than considering multiple objectives. For instance, prioritizing projects that restore natural river processes may not be appropriate for all river reaches, especially

³⁴ December 2003 NRC report, p. 19.

lower reaches that are more altered than less-disturbed upper reaches. In the lower basin which is more heavily developed and leveed, a greater number of engineered restoration activities are being recommended by the Corps than in the upper basin. For example, the Corps recommends artificially mimicking a natural hydrograph to restore ecological processes (e.g., pumping water out of areas with water levels raised by dams) for reaches where natural river restoration options are limited by the navigation system and development. A solution using a more natural river process might be to change dam operations to decrease water levels, thus harming navigation, but this option is not considered in the Corps plan because the agency considers it outside the scope of the feasibility study and navigation project.

H.R. 4686. The Mississippi River Protection and Restoration Act of 2004 — H.R. 4686 — provides for ecosystem restoration of the UMRS by expanding the Environmental Management Program and establishing a trust fund (financed by the Federal Treasury and charitable donations) to pay for the program. The bill calls for half of the annually appropriated funds for UMR-IWW operations and maintenance to be reserved to carry out restoration projects, recreation projects, and monitoring of waterway traffic movements. It amends the existing EMP in numerous ways, including increasing the authorized appropriation level for the habitat restoration projects from \$22.75 million to \$80 million annually (until the trust fund contains \$2.5 billion), authorizing \$35 million annually for purchase of floodplain land, and increases the annual appropriation limit for recreation projects from \$0.5 million to \$10 million. The bill also addresses other environmental and flooding issues along the entire Mississippi River.

In contrast, the Corps plan would create a new structure and program for restoration investments. It does not recommend dismantling the EMP, but its coordinated implementation with the proposed ecosystem restoration plan. In contrast to the annual authorization limits in H.R. 4686, the Corps recommends a 15-year authorization of \$1.46 billion. This would be in addition to the current EMP authorization. Although the Corps plan has no annual authorization for or annual restriction on land acquisition (beyond its 15-year limit of 35,000 acres), H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773 would restrict floodplain land acquisition to \$35 million annually. Neither the Corps plan, H.R. 4785, S. 2470, nor S. 2773 specify authorizations for UMRS recreation projects.

Conclusions

The Corps' preferred plan recommends a first increment of navigation (\$1.88 billion) and ecosystem restoration investments (\$1.46 billion); the Corps recommends that these investments be made using an adaptive approach and as part of a long-term framework for dual-purpose operations. The plan aims to improve navigation efficiency by building seven 1,200-foot locks that will reduce delays caused by decoupling of barge tows. The study's objective for ecosystem restoration is to recommend measures to address cumulative impacts that are degrading the UMRS ecosystem, including the ongoing effects of O&M of the navigation system. Restoration efforts are limited geographically to the UMR-IWW and its floodplain and to the scope of the navigation project and its feasibility study; a more

comprehensive watershed approach is not part of the plan recommended in the feasibility report.

Three bills — H.R. 4785, S. 2470, and S. 2773 — would authorize many of the elements of the Corps' recommendation for the first increment of investments. The Corps anticipates a Chief's report by November 2004. The bills would authorize seven new navigation locks and small-scale navigation measures; no mention is made of a Chief's report, or a long-term framework or plan for navigation investments. The adaptive implementation process that the Corps recommended for integrating new information into the lock construction decision to manage the risk and uncertainty of making large-scale investments is also not addressed.

Following the Corps' preferred plan, the three bills would authorize ecosystem restoration activities to be carried out in accordance with the framework in the feasibility report, and they would require operational changes to the UMR-IWW consistent with requirements to avoid any adverse impact on navigation. In addition, S. 2773 contains three provisions related to implementation of ecosystem restoration. The provisions would require a comparable rate of progress for navigation and restoration projects, outcome-oriented project design, and the development of a ranking system for restoration projects that prioritizes natural river processes.

H.R. 4686 differs from the Corps' plan, because the Corps recommends (1) integrated investments in navigation and ecosystem restoration, and (2) a new structure for UMRS ecosystem restoration efforts. In contrast, H.R. 4686 would build on the existing EMP, thus emphasizing that some groups consider ecosystem restoration investments separate from the decision to expand navigation capacity.