

December 16, 2021

The Honorable Michael Connor
Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
108 Army Pentagon, Room 3E446
Washington, DC 20310

Dear Assistant Secretary Connor,

As you work to implement Public Law 117-58, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), the undersigned members of the Agricultural Transportation Working Group (ATWG) urge you to prioritize the construction of the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP) on the Upper Mississippi River System (UMRS).

The ATWG is comprised of associations that represent farmers, ranchers, food and beverage manufacturers, processors, package suppliers, farm supply dealers and agricultural product marketers that support and sustain millions of American jobs, many in rural communities. Our members rely on a robust and competitive transportation system, including U.S. highways, bridges, railways, ports, and inland waterways.

The IIJA prudently includes a \$2.5 billion investment for construction of inland waterways projects and specifies that prioritization must be placed on projects included in the 2020 Inland and Intracoastal Waterways Capital Investment Strategy (CIS).

The CIS prioritizes thirteen new start construction projects, the majority of which are the new 1,200-foot NESP locks. This includes Lock 25 (Tier A), LaGrange Lock (Tier A), and Lock 24 (Tier B) on the UMRS. These projects have been vetted through collaboration between the Corps and the Inland Waterways Users Board.

The existing locks on the UMRS were built in the 1930's with 600-foot chambers to accommodate the standard vessels used for commerce during that time. However, today's towboats can push a 1,200-foot-long tow of 15 barges which must "double-lock" through, resulting in significant, costly delays. These delays adversely impact the agricultural value chain as the UMRS is a vital artery for transporting numerous commodities including corn, soybeans, and fertilizer.

Modernizing America's inland waterways system by constructing these new 1,200-foot NESP locks will boost U.S. agricultural competitiveness, create construction jobs and increase the overall efficiency and reliability of the inland waterways navigation system. NESP also includes a substantial ecosystem restoration component to ensure the environmental sustainability of the river.

Our members are dedicated to providing safe, abundant, affordable and sustainably produced human and animal food, fiber and agricultural products that benefit U.S. and global consumers. Our ability to fulfill this mission depends on a reliable and efficient transportation system. This was recently underscored by a group of farmer-led organizations pledging \$1 million in funding

to get NESP started. Achieving these new 1,200-foot locks as part of NESP is all the more important considering that a 15-barge tow transports the same amount of dry cargo as 216 rail cars and 1,050 trucks, and the comparison is even greater for liquid cargo. Modernizing these outdated locks will help discipline rail rates, reduce wear and tear on U.S. roads and bridges, and make American agriculture more competitive.

As you develop a detailed spending plan for the \$2.5 billion for inland waterways construction projects, the ATWG strongly urges the Corps to adhere to the CIS, pursuant to the IJA, by funding Lock 25, LaGrange Lock, and Lock 24 to completion.

Sincerely,

Agricultural and Food Transporters Conference
Agricultural Retailers Association
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Feed Industry Association
American Soybean Association
Consumer Brands Association
Corn Refiners Association
Farm Credit Council
The Fertilizer Institute
Growth Energy
National Aquaculture Association
National Corn Growers Association
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
National Farmers Union
National Grain and Feed Association
National Milk Producers Federation
National Oilseed Processors Association
North American Millers' Association
North American Renderers Association
Pet Food Institute
Soy Transportation Coalition
Specialty Soya and Grains Alliance
USA Rice
US Rice Producers Association
Waterways Council, Inc.

CC: President Joseph R. Biden, Secretary Tom Vilsack, Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Senior Advisor Brian Deese, Senior Advisor Mitch Landrieu