

January 8, 2021

The Honorable R.D. James  
Assistant Secretary of the Army, Civil Works  
[rickey.d.james.civ@mail.mil](mailto:rickey.d.james.civ@mail.mil)  
108 Army Pentagon, Room 3E446  
Washington, DC 20310-0108

Dear Assistant Secretary James:

We are writing to urge a new construction start for the Navigation & Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP) in the FY 2021 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) Workplan. The new start is provided by the Energy & Water Development appropriations bill, passed through the Omnibus on December 21 and signed into law on December 27.

A start of NESP follows the Corps (September 2020) draft Capital Investment Strategy, developed collaboratively with the Inland Waterways Users Board and endorsed by the industry, which pays into the Inland Waterways Trust Fund to fund a portion of construction.

The construction of NESP's seven locks at key locations will create almost 50 million man-hours of living-wage jobs for America's building trades, generating revenue that will provide multiple returns right back to our region. Continued reliance on 1930's lock infrastructure, with its aged condition and constrained capacity, will lead to higher freight rates, more traffic congestion with increased dependence on other modes with higher emissions.

Barges transport products Americans use every day including cement, steel, petroleum and petrochemicals, coal, road salt, and other underpinnings of our economy. Our nation's inland navigation system provides a key strategic advantage to our manufacturing sector, but the agriculture community in particular relies on locks and dams. Moving America's harvest to world markets, more than 60 percent of exports travel down the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers, keeping America's farmers competitive in the global market.

The National Corn Growers Association represents nearly 40,000 dues paying corn farmers nationwide and nearly 300,000 growers who contribute through the corn checkoff program in their states. America's corn farmers need reliable means of moving their crops to customers, whether it is to livestock feed yards, grain elevators, the ethanol plant, or ports for export. Farmers use a variety of forms of transportation, with the inland waterway being a vital artery of transportation for our products, especially in the Midwest.

With 12,000 miles of commercially navigable channels and over 240 lock sites, inland waterways allow our nation's corn growers to move their products to and from 38 states as well as internationally. The United States is the world's largest exporter of corn; however we receive tough competition from countries like Brazil and Argentina. Given more that more than half of corn exports are transported via the inland waterways, continuing to invest in this system is critically important to our industry's competitiveness.

A recent study, *Importance of Inland Waterways to U.S. Agriculture* by the U.S. Department of Agriculture\* concluded that transportation by our inland waterways saves between \$7 billion-\$9 billion annually in transportation costs. That same study concluded that increased investment in lock and dam construction, including NESP, would raise Gross Domestic Product by \$72 billion through 2045, with a 19 percent increase of waterways-related employment. Additionally, market value of U.S. corn and soybeans would raise by \$39 billion.

Commodities moving through Lock 25 alone directly touches 132 counties in 17 states, plus international destinations. *The Impacts of Unscheduled Lock Outages*, a study prepared for the U.S. Maritime Administration and National Waterways Foundation in 2017, revealed that an unplanned, extended closure of Lock 25 would cost the shipping community an additional \$1.6 billion annually in additional shipping charges, and lead to a diversion off-river that would discourage 80 percent of users to return to barge transportation.

NESP was authorized in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2007 has been reinforced by Congress multiple times with nearly \$70 million already appropriated for Pre-Construction Engineering and Design (PED), previous Appropriations report language and 'dear colleague' letters, to name a few. It has continual bipartisan support from the governors and legislatures of the five Upper Mississippi River Basin states and is supported by countless non-government organizations.

An immediate start of NESP would bring positive impacts on the economy and the environment, realized in the near-term but certainly with more long-term benefits. I am hopeful that you will recognize the importance of NESP to the economy and our environment by working to see its inclusion in the FY21 workplan. Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,