



PRESS RELEASE

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October 2, 2017

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UPDATE: 1:29 p.m. Eastern: The hydraulics at Lock 53 have been repaired and commercial navigation has resumed locking through the main chamber on the Ohio River.

OHIO RIVER CLOSED: FAILURES AT LOCKS & DAMS 52 AND 53 HIGHLIGHT AGING, CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE OPPORTUNITY AHEAD TO MODERNIZE INLAND WATERWAYS

Washington, DC – The Ohio River is closed today, after the failure of hydraulics that open and close the lower gate at Lock 53 near Brookport, Illinois. This closure was preceded in mid-September by an obstruction found in the main chamber at the lock that did not allow the gates to close properly. And an early September failure of the wooden wickets at nearby Lock & Dam (L&D) 52 also highlighted critical, but aging, lock and dam infrastructure on the inland waterways system, Waterways Council, Inc. (WCI) notes. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is attempting to fix the problems as vessels shipping key commodities wait in a growing queue that is currently 46 miles long.

In service since 1928, Locks and Dams 52 and 53 on the Ohio River are to be replaced by the Olmsted Lock and Dam which was authorized in 1988, but will not open until next year. Once Olmsted is finished, Locks and Dams 52 and 53 will be removed.

The failures at L&D 52 and 53 are occurring during the low-water season on the Ohio River. The Corps raises the dams located at the locks to maintain pools of stable water for navigation, municipal and industrial water supply, recreation, and other purposes. Engineers within the Corps have been working tirelessly to undertake emergency measures, including building sections of the missing dams with rock dumped into the river (called a “bear trap”), installing a rock dyke in front of the bear trap, controlling river velocity from up-stream dams to allow divers to make repairs safely, and trying to replace parts of the failed hydraulic system.

As a result of the emergency outage at L&D 53, more than 65 towboats laden with harvest season grain and other commodities are backed up like a massive truck wreck along an interstate corridor. Power plants, manufacturing plants and municipalities that draw water from the Ohio River have been advised by the Corps that the pools of water they depend on may be lost within a week.

Other back-ups have occurred up and down the Ohio River, including locks at Smithland, Cannelton, Meldahl and Dashiels.

The failure of this critical infrastructure comes just months after President Trump visited the Ohio River on June 7, proclaiming that “these critical corridors of commerce depend on a dilapidated system of locks and dams that are more than half a century old. And their condition, as you know better than anybody, is in bad shape. It continues to decay. Capital improvements of the system, which [are] so important, have been massively underfunded. And there's an \$8.7 billion maintenance backlog that is only getting bigger and getting worse....citizens know firsthand that the rivers, like the beautiful Ohio River, carry the life blood of our heartland.”

He also noted a similar outage on the river near Pittsburgh, saying, “Last December ... one lock built more than 50 years ago had to be shut down for five days due to hydraulic failure. And you know what that means? Five days means everything comes to a halt. We simply cannot tolerate a five-day shutdown on a major thoroughfare for American coal, American oil, and American steel, which is going to get more and bigger....America must have the best fastest and most reliable infrastructure anywhere in the world. We cannot accept these conditions any longer.”

The Administration announced that it will undertake a \$1 trillion infrastructure initiative to repair America’s infrastructure. WCI continues to advocate for modernization of the inland waterways lock and dam infrastructure as part of this initiative.

“Together, we will fix it. We will create the first-class infrastructure our country and our people deserve,” the President said in his speech on the Ohio River.

Waterways Council, Inc. is the national public policy organization advocating for a modern and well-maintained national system of ports and inland waterways. The group is supported by waterways carriers, shippers, port authorities, agriculture, labor and conservation organizations, shipping associations and waterways advocacy groups from all regions of the country. Visit www.waterwayscouncil.org.