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EDITOR'S PICK

## Inland waterways advocates optimistic about the future

By DAVID ZOELLER [dzoeller@paducahsun.com](mailto:dzoeller@paducahsun.com) Dec 9, 2018

Advocates of the inland waterways system are encouraged by increased awareness of the critical role it plays in the nation's overall transportation infrastructure and the need to fund it efficiently.

Several hundred of them were in Paducah this week to attend the Seaman's Church Institute's River Bell awards luncheon Thursday at the Paducah-McCracken County Convention & Expo Center.

In addition, the Waterways Council Inc., the Washington, D.C.-based advocacy organization, has held its executive committee meeting here for the past several years during that time.

"This has been a really great year for the inland waterways system," said Deb Calhoun, WCI's senior vice president.

According to Calhoun, FY '18 funding for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' included record amounts for civil works projects, \$6.83 billion, and operations and maintenance, \$3.63 billion, and \$409 million to fund key projects such as Olmsted Locks and Dam, the Lower Mon Locks and Dam in Pittsburgh, Kentucky Lock and Dam, and Chickamauga Lock and Dam near Chattanooga.

FY '19 includes \$6.99 billion for the civil works mission, \$328 million in funding for the four above-mentioned projects, plus a fifth project on the Illinois waterways very important to the agriculture sector, and \$3.74 billion for operations and maintenance.

"This is the fourth consecutive year of record levels for civil works missions," Calhoun said. "Keeping those five projects moving forward, funded fully and efficiently, that's the kind of thing we've really been looking for, for the Corps to be able to take that money and do as much work as they can in that fiscal year."

In 2018, Olmsted Locks and Dam became operational with an Aug. 30 dedication ceremony, four years ahead of schedule and approximately \$330 million below the most recent cost estimate. That allowed the outdated locks and dams 52 and 53 on the Ohio River to be taken out of service removing a long-time bottleneck.

Plans for 2019 include working with new management of the U.S. House of Representatives (including committee and subcommittee chairs), and continuing to develop workable cost-sharing formulas for the Inland Waterways Trust Fund, supported by the industry and the federal government.

Both Calhoun, and Matt Ricketts, president/CEO of Paducah-based Crouse Corp. and a WCI executive committee member, are encouraged by the congressional support for the inland waterways, both from Kentucky's federal delegation and others.

"We're encouraged by the support we've received the past few years from our congressional leaders obviously here in Kentucky, but also from other states across the system," Ricketts said.

Ricketts is optimistic that President Donald Trump's administration and the new Democratic majority in the U.S. House of Representatives will work together on an infrastructure initiative that includes the inland waterways.

"I think they understand our story," Ricketts said. "What we're working on now is the most appropriate structure to make sure we can provide the resources for these projects and keep them moving on an efficient basis.

"Hopefully there's going to be an infrastructure initiative and they can come up with a plan to provide significant dollars to upgrade the infrastructure of the country and we can be a part of it," he said.

"We have a system that works if we could just optimize it and keep moving forward."