



November 16, 2021

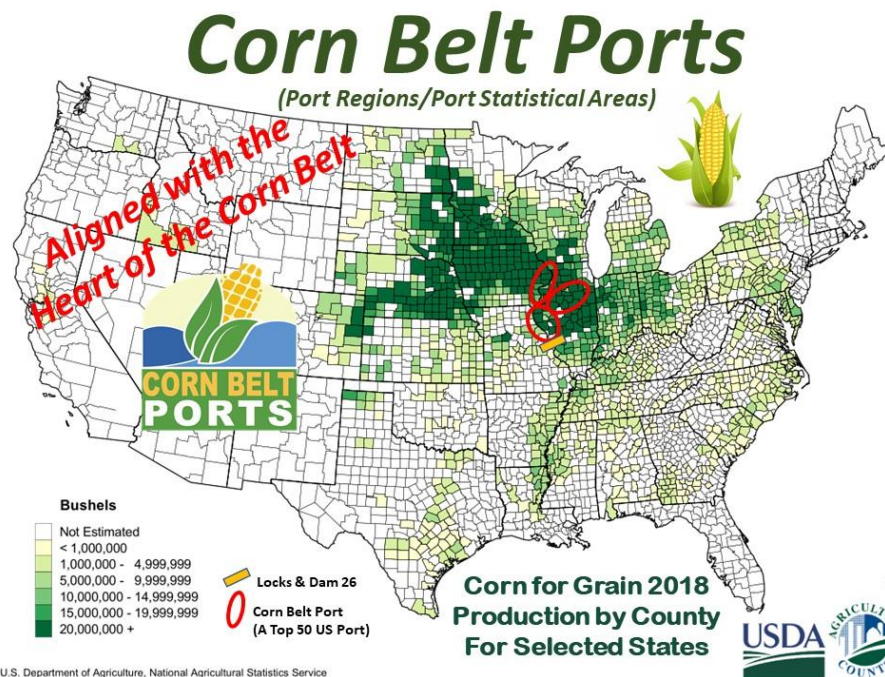
The Honorable Michael L. Connor
Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works
Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army
108 Army Pentagon
Washington DC, 20310

Lieutenant General Scott A. Spellmon
Chief of Engineers and Commanding General
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20314-1000

Dear Honorable Michael L. Connor and Lieutenant General Scott A. Spellmon:

As you prepare the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Work Plan (Spend Plan) in response to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, we strongly urge you to include a new construction start for the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP) from the \$2.5 billion provided for construction and major rehabilitation of inland waterways projects. We appreciate that the Corps has included funding for preconstruction engineering and design (PED) for the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway System projects in the FY20 and FY21 Work Plans. A new start will allow the momentum of this needed work to continue.

The Corn Belt Ports are the ports and terminals in the Heart of the Corn Belt in the Tri-State (IL, MO, IA) Region above Locks and Dam 26 (map below).




The Corn Belt Ports consist of the Illinois Waterway Ports and Terminals, the Mississippi River Ports of Eastern Iowa and Western Illinois, and the Mid-America Port Commission which is geographically defined by the confluence of the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers. All three routinely rank individually as a Top 50 Principal U.S. Port based on freight tonnage handled, and collectively they are the equivalent of the largest inland port in the nation. The Corn Belt Ports are an essential part of the global supply chain, and need modern, resilient, safe, reliable, and sustainable access to national and global markets.

Authorized in 2007, NESP is a critically important multi-purpose program that allows the Corps to address both navigation and ecosystem restoration in an integrated approach that retrofits steamboat era locks and dams in the Heart of the Corn Belt with modern, safer and more efficient 1200' locks at seven existing sites. Locks are bridges between navigation pools, and these seven locks constructed in the 1930s are decades past their design life. All seven of these locks are in the top 12 of the "new start construction projects" listed in the current Inland Waterways Capital Investment Strategy (CIS) Report, and they should be given priority for funding under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Additionally, NESP provides a comprehensive ecosystem restoration for the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers, and both rivers are critically important natural infrastructure for our nation.

NESP maintains broad, bipartisan support in Congress, and, in recent fiscal years, both the House and Senate Energy and Water Appropriations bills and reports have included continued funding for PED and called for the Corps to advance projects authorized in Title VIII of the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 (PL 110-114).

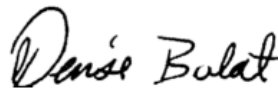
We urge the Corps to move forward with a new construction start for NESP in the Work Plan (Spend Plan) being developed in response to the recently signed Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Sincerely,


Robert A. Sinkler
Executive Coordinating Director
Corn Belt Ports


Dan Silverthorn, Chair
Heart of Illinois Regional Port District/
Transportation Coordinator, Illinois Waterway
Ports and Terminals


Thomas A. Oakley, Transportation Chair
Tri-State Development Summit


Mike Norris, Chair
Mid-America Port Commission


Denise Bulat, Executive Director
Bi-State Regional Commission/
Transportation Coordinator,
Mississippi River Ports of Eastern Iowa
and Western Illinois Collaboration

cc: The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack, Secretary U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, D.C. 20250