

# CAPITOL CURRENTS

WATERWAYS  
COUNCIL, INC.

September 27, 2022



## FOR CONGRESS, RECESS IS OVER, SPRINT TO THE FINISH

**By Former Senator Blanche L. Lincoln, Founder and Principal, Lincoln Policy Group**

Congress has returned to Washington following its annual August recess with just a short time until the 2022 midterm elections in November. The August break has traditionally afforded members the opportunity to spend important time touring their state or district to talk to constituents to better understand their needs. When I was in Congress, touring manufacturing plants, timber and sawmills, farms, ports and terminals on the Arkansas and Mississippi Rivers, or holding town halls with my constituents was without a doubt the best part of my job! Of course, if there was an election on the horizon, I was also crisscrossing the district or state to campaign, asking for support. Upon our return to Washington in September after the recess, I was energized. I am reminded of how productive Congress used to be when there were regional caucuses designed to foster bipartisan cooperation benefiting a particular region.

With Congress back to business, one of its most important jobs is to provide funding for the federal government in the form of 12 annual appropriations

bills, covering various functions of government. In fact, that process – deciding how much money to spend each year, what to spend it on, and how to raise the money to cover some or all of that spending – is one of the main responsibilities of the U.S. Congress. The appropriations process is supposed to be completed by the beginning of the fiscal year, October 1st. However, we all know that Congress has made a habit of not completing this process on time. In fact, the last time Congress completed all appropriations bills on time was over 25 years ago in 1996! Instead of a functioning appropriations process, Congress has resorted to passing large omnibus appropriations bills and Continuing Resolutions (CR) that carry over spending from the previous year. Unfortunately, this year is likely no different, and I expect Congress will pass a CR that takes us past the election into a Lame Duck session of Congress. Members have often lamented this situation and vowed to get annual appropriations done on time but like the great Yankee catcher Yogi Berra said, “It’s like déjà vu all over again.”

Of course, when it comes to other key actions in Congress, the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA)



*Former Senator Blanche Lincoln*

**Continued on page 2**

### IN THIS ISSUE:

- 2 **Legislator Profile:**  
Congresswoman  
Julia Letlow
- 5 **WCI Member Spotlight:**  
Thalle Construction  
Company Inc.
- 6 **Living Lands & Waters**  
Turns 25
- 9 **WCI to Hold 19th Annual**  
Waterways Symposium

# FOR CONGRESS, RECESS IS OVER, SPRINT TO THE FINISH

Continued from page 1

2022 bill is currently pending in a House and Senate Conference Committee. Within that conference, the WCI team is working hard to secure a provision that will elevate the inland waterways construction and major rehabilitation cost-share to 75% general revenues/25% Inland Waterways Trust Fund (IWTF). I know many of you over the August recess helped to amplify the message of support for this cost-share provision and that is extremely helpful to the cause. We are optimistic a conference report can be finalized soon and signed into law in early October. While challenges remain, if the cost-share change is part of a final bill, it could significantly shorten the timeframe for key navigation projects to be completed and return transportation benefits to the nation.

The importance of America’s inland waterways and its relationship to a strong U.S. economy were evident to me at a very young age growing up on the Mississippi River in Helena, Arkansas. After returning home from the Army in the late 1940s, my father began his dream career as a farmer, growing mainly rice and wheat. I share his belief of how important American agriculture is to our nation and the world, as well as the treasure we have with our inland waterways to provide a safe, efficient, and affordable way to get our products to the world. I was proud to maintain that firm belief during my service in the House, Senate, and especially as the first woman and the first Arkansan

to serve as chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee. And now, I’m grateful and proud to continue working on behalf of WCI with DC policymakers.

There is no doubt that as Congress finishes up its legislative days in September, it’s sure to be clouded in election politics. But, I’m hopeful during that time, and in the Lame Duck session, Congress can come together and get work done for the American people.

These issues and more will be discussed in-depth at WCI’s Annual Waterways Symposium and Board of Directors meeting, December 7-8 in Paducah, KY. The Board meeting is open to all WCI members in good standing, and the Symposium - #SYM22 - is open to any registered attendees. [Registration for the Symposium can be made here.](#) Hope to see you there!❖

*Senator Lincoln served as U.S. Senator from Arkansas from 1999-2011. She was the first woman elected to the Senate from Arkansas since 1932 and the youngest woman ever elected to the Senate. She previously served in the U.S. House of Representatives, representing Arkansas’s 1st congressional district from 1993-1997.*

*After leaving Congress, she founded and is the Principal of Lincoln Policy Group, which offers government relations counsel to WCI.*

## LEGISLATOR PROFILE: REP. JULIA LETLOW (R-LA)

*In this issue of Capitol Currents we profile another elected official who has championed inland waterways: Congresswoman Julia Letlow of Louisiana’s Fifth District.*



*Rep. Julia Letlow*

Congresswoman Julia Letlow represents Louisiana’s 5th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives and is the state’s first Republican woman elected to Congress.

Julia took office in April 2021 after receiving 65 percent of the vote in a special election to win the seat previously won by her husband Luke, who passed away from complications of COVID-19. She is the first woman to represent Louisiana in the House of Representatives in 30 years.

Julia serves on the House Committee on Appropriations, holding seats on the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs.

**Continued on page 3**

# LEGISLATOR PROFILE: REP. JULIA LETLOW (R-LA)

Continued from page 2

## BIOGRAPHICAL FACTS

**Name**

Julia Barnhill Letlow

**Born**

March 16, 1981 in Monroe, Louisiana

**Family**

son Jeremiah (5) and daughter Jacqueline (2)

**Occupation**

Higher Education Administrator and Instructor

**Education**

University of Louisiana Monroe (B.A., 2002)  
 University of Louisiana Monroe (M.A., 2005)  
 University of South Florida (Ph.D., 2011)

**Public Office**

April 14, 2021-Present

**Q: Your district borders a large stretch of the Mississippi River and contains many facilities supporting economic activity worldwide. Can you describe the importance of Louisiana’s 5th District and why efficient navigation on the Mississippi River is so important to the world?**

I’m incredibly proud of the fact that my district has the longest continuous stretch of the Mississippi River in the nation. It’s the superhighway that connects our region to the world, bringing in needed materials and helping us transport the soybeans, rice, cotton, corn, grain sorghum, sweet potatoes, and sugar we grow to market. Any shutdown on the river is a significant hit to our economy. I’m constantly talking with our ports and the Corps of Engineers



*Letlow was sworn into office in April 2021. Photo by The Advocate.*

to make sure we’re keeping commerce flowing.

**Q: Describe your reaction when you were appointed to the House Committee on Appropriations. What does this committee assignment mean to your district and state?**

I’m ecstatic to be the newest member of the Appropriations Committee. I can’t overstate how crucial this seat is for my district and for Louisiana. We have some of the greatest needs in terms of education, infrastructure, and economic development. I’m working to make sure we can bring substantial investments home and help fund projects

that will be truly transformational for our region.

**Q: What do you consider to be your most significant challenge that you’ve overcome as a freshman member of Congress?**

I’m somewhat new to politics, so it has been quite a transition. Learning the House’s rules and floor processes has been an experience. I’ll tell you, my freshman year in Congress feels a lot like my freshman year of high school. Learning where to sit in the cafeteria and navigating the underground tunnels takes a while. I’ve had to ask for directions more times than I would like to admit.

**Q: What personal achievement are most proud of and why?**

I placed first in the Long Jump at the Louisiana State Track Meet with a jump of 18 feet. I still hold the High School record to this day.

**Q: If you had to choose one musical artist to listen to for the rest of your life, who would you choose and why?**

John Mayer – his music is the soundtrack of my high school and college days!❖



*Rep. Letlow was named to the powerful House Appropriations Committee in her first term in office.*



# INLAND WATERWAYS USERS BOARD MEETS, ADDRESSES ONGOING PROJECT COSTS INCREASES

By Dustin Davidson, WCI Director of Government Relations

On August 16th, the Inland Waterways Users Board (IWUB) held its 97th meeting in Walla Walla, Washington. Leading up to the meeting, members of the IWUB were hyper-focused on one issue in particular: transparency. As stewards of the Inland Waterways Trust Fund (IWTF) and advisors to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the IWUB has been blindsided by delays and changes in the costs of projects. Fortunately, this meeting was an opportunity for the IWUB and the Corps to do a deep-dive into the issues that are plaguing some lock and dam projects.

Of the many topics discussed during the meeting, the most important is the increase in costs for ongoing projects, some funded through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (IIJA). It was announced at the meeting that both the Lower Monongahela and Chickamauga

Locks projects will need additional funding, after being considered funded to completion through IIJA and the pending Fy23 Energy and Water appropriations. Lower Monongahela is expected to need an additional \$109 million in Fiscal Year 2024, and Chickamauga lock will need an additional \$96 million when a dispute with the current contractor gets settled. A similar discussion occurred when the IWUB discussed the progress of Montgomery Lock and Dam. According to the updated cost estimates, the Corps will need an additional \$200 million to fund this project to completion.

In the face of cost overruns, the IWUB also voiced concerns over the growing, unallocated balance in the IWTF. According to the Corps, the current balance is \$165 million. Moving forward, the Board asked the Corps to more accurately portray the balance in

the IWTF in their IWUB presentations, as Chairman Murphy stated, “it is important for the board to know what is in the checking account to better help the Corps plan for future projects.” On a better note, the Corps announced that they will allocate the roughly \$114 million available from the \$2.5 billion provided in the IIJA.

Overall, the IWUB meeting was disappointing and illustrated the need for industry and the Corps to build a stronger relationship as they work through a time of uncertainty. There is no doubt that the Corps has a great deal of work to do. But additional projects that are authorized for construction cannot be allowed to linger at a time when the cost of goods is increasing. Inland waterways projects around the nation are becoming a growing priority, and the IWUB aims to use the IWTF to address these projects.❖



(Left to right): IWUB Chairman Spencer Murphy (Canal Barge Company) delivers his opening statement at the August IWUB Board meeting with Major General William (Butch) H. Graham, Deputy Commanding General for Civil and Emergency Operations; Mark Pointon, Designated Federal Officer, IWUB; and Damon Judd (Marquette Transportation Co., LLC).



# WCI MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: THALLE CONSTRUCTION COMPANY INC.

**T**halle Construction Company Inc. (Thalle), which joined WCI in May, is a heavy civil construction company established in 1947. The company is a proud representative of The Tully Group (Tully), established in 1921, that developed into one of the nation's largest privately held, family-owned construction firms. Thalle maintains a corporate office located in Hillsborough, North Carolina and a regional office in Alvarado, Texas. Thalle currently has active heavy civil construction projects spanning from New York to South Florida to Texas and continues to expand its geographical footprint across the United States which includes focused interest in the Midwest and on inland waterways infrastructure. Its diverse and expansive capabilities allow Thalle to succeed in many challenging heavy civil infrastructure projects that incorporate all degrees of civil construction including conventional concrete, roller compacted concrete and earthen dams, navigational waterway locks, reservoirs, large diameter underground utilities, treatment facilities, landfills, site Work, mass soil & rock excavation, coal ash closures, DOT highway & bridge construction, and on-demand emergency services.

Thalle has expanded in the past 74 years to become a leading infrastructure contractor in the United States, tracing its history back to America's post-World War II expansion era. In the 1990s, Thalle's operations expanded into the Southeast, and eventually, the company's headquarters was moved to Hillsborough in 1999. Through its association with the Tully Group, Thalle has financial strength and a \$3+ billion-dollar bonding capacity for large projects.

Thalle is led by Peter Tully, CEO, Stephen Kohler, President and COO, and Larry Fantozzi, Executive VP, with a combined senior leadership experience of more than 100 years.

As an industry leader in large dams, locks, and heavy civil infrastructure, waterways projects are at the forefront of the company's core philosophies. The company is a long-term partner with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), as demonstrated through the successful completion of several large waterways projects. Its scope of work centers around large earthwork and concrete structures, soil cement, large diameter piping and valves, cofferdams, and pump stations. This enables the company to not only construct new infrastructure but to rehabilitate aging infrastructure to ensure the safe passage of public and waterborne transportation for generations to come.

Thalle's most significant inland waterways project is the

first and second phases of Kentucky Lock on the Tennessee River. Starting in 2010, Thalle constructed the upstream miter gate and initial monoliths during phase 1. More recently in 2021, Thalle was awarded the downstream completion contract by the USACE to complete the remainder of the monoliths and downstream miter gate. Providing a new 1200-foot chamber at Kentucky Lock will increase barge traffic and reduce wait times, helping the Tennessee river economy for the future.

"Being an industry leader for infrastructure construction along the inland waterways, it was imperative to Thalle to join WCI. The legislative work done by WCI, coordinating with transportation and manufacturing companies, and the significant impact on assisting different stakeholders within our waterways community makes the membership an easy choice for Thalle. We appreciate all the work done by WCI and look forward to a long-term continued partnership both at Kentucky Lock and the future infrastructure projects all along the Mississippi and Ohio river basins, Atlantic Coast River basins, and the Gulf Coast region," said Seth Rowney, Thalle Senior Estimator.❖

**THALLE**  
CONSTRUCTION COMPANY  
A TULLY GROUP COMPANY



***Thalle has done work on the first and second phases of the Kentucky Lock addition, beginning in 2010 with construction of the upstream miter gate and initial monoliths. In 2021, the company was awarded the downstream completion contract to complete the remainder of the monoliths and downstream miter gate.***

# CONSERVATION COLUMN: LIVING LANDS & WATERS CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF CLEANING UP OUR RIVERS

Headquartered in East Moline, Illinois, Living Lands & Waters (LL&W) is a 501 (c)(3) environmental organization established by Chad Pregracke in 1998. Since its founding, LL&W has grown to be the only “industrial strength” river cleanup organization like it in the world.

Spending up to nine months a year living and traveling on the barge, the LL&W crew hosts river cleanups, watershed conservation initiatives, workshops, tree plantings, and other key conservation efforts. Its mission is:

- To aid in the protection, preservation, and restoration of the natural environment of our nation’s major rivers and their watersheds.
- To expand awareness of environmental issues and responsibility encompassing our rivers.
- To create a desire and opportunity for citizens to take an active role in helping to make a cleaner river environment.

The group celebrates its 25th year in 2022 and Capitol Currents was able to catch up with Chad on the special occasion:

**Q:** Tell us the impetus for starting a river cleanup project 25 years ago, a brief history?

**A:** I grew up on the Mississippi River and my brother started shell diving. We called it “clamming.” They’d take these shells and punch a bead in them, and then they’d insert the bead in oyster farms over in Japan. I sorted shells with him for about a year, then I started diving on my own. I was a commercial shell diver from age 16 to 21.

While clamming I would sleep on the islands to save on fuel costs. That is when I started noticing all of the garbage. There were tires, scrap metal, cans, plastic and metal 55-gallon barrels, tops of school buses, basically anything that you could find at a landfill was in and around the Mississippi River. I quickly realized no one was picking it up or had plans to, so I

started doing it on my own.

**Q:** How many millions of tons of garbage have you picked up out of the rivers to date? And with how many volunteers over all these years?

**A:** We have removed 12,827,315 pounds of trash from 25 rivers in 21 different states and have worked with over 120,000 volunteers.

**Q:** Do you feel that your efforts have helped to educate boaters and those who use the rivers not to litter, to focus on sustaining this great resource?

**A:** Yes, typically any boater that passes us by on the rivers will ask what we are doing, and then proceed to tell us how they always pick up any litter that they see floating while they are fishing, pleasure boating, skiing, etc. It is really cool hearing how they want to have a positive impact on the rivers because they mean so much to them.

**Q:** What’s the weirdest thing you have found in the river?

**A:** It was found at a marine challenge event, in Paducah, by an ACBL employee. It was an 1863 Civil War Mortar Shell that was still live. We called the police, they assessed it and had to call the bomb squad. It must have been fired at a steamboat back in the day.

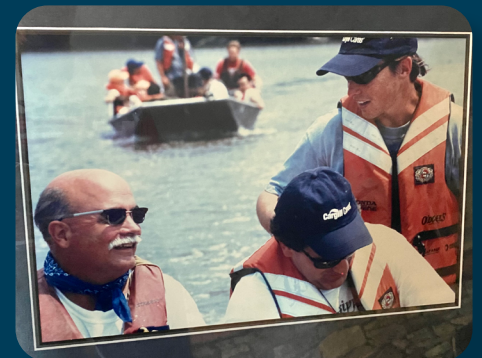
**Q:** When/how did your tree-planting project become part of LL&W? How many have you planted to date?

**A:** I started planting trees on the islands of the upper Mississippi river to create more food for wildlife. Our mission is to not only clean up the riverways but to also enhance the watershed by planting native trees and removing invasive plants.

In 2007, we started collecting and planting acorns with the goal of growing one million trees. We reached that goal in 2016 and now we’re shooting for another million! To date, we have planted and distributed 1,780,045 trees.

## Message from the LL&W Chairman, Rick Calhoun:

I am proud to be serving as the current Chairman of the Board of Living Lands and Waters. I first met Chad very early in his cleanup career, when he was a one-man show hitching rides up and down the river in a boat barely big enough for one load of trash and himself. He approached Cargill, where I worked, early on for a donation and I recall thinking, “this kid wants to clean up the Mississippi River? Right...” But his infectious enthusiasm and confidence for the job quickly secured a small donation to help keep him afloat (literally). Today, Cargill is among Chad’s largest donors. Chad truly will become an important part of American history. Our rivers — and our planet — are far stronger because of his work and his commitment. And, I am far better to call him my friend for more than two decades.



**Photo:** A young Rick Calhoun (lower left) and an even younger Chad Pregracke (upper right) work on a river cleanup project in Minnesota around the year 2000.

**Continued on page 7**



# LIVING LANDS & WATERS CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF CLEANING UP

## OUR RIVERS

Continued from page 6

**Q:** When/how did the river classroom/ education part of LL&W begin? Any plans for the future in that regard?

**A:** *My parents were teachers and to me education is an important part of what we do. In 2002, we held our first teacher education workshop and shortly thereafter we built our floating classroom. As for future plans, we are in the process of building another classroom barge. This will educate students about the river and water quality, but more specifically about what type of jobs are available in the maritime industry, and how one can be involved with river life. To me, the river is 2,300 miles of opportunity.*

**Q:** What has been the secret to your success after all these years?

**A:** *Hard work and persistence. Take it one piece of trash at a time. Keep moving forward. I've had lots of boats sink, and I had so many problems the first five years. It was a great learning experience, but I just had to talk to myself: "You have to keep*

*going, whatever happens. You just have to go through it, over it, around it, under it, whatever it takes. You just have to keep moving forward." Once I got into that mindset, that problems are going to happen all the time and that it is just what it is, that helped a lot.*

**Q:** Tell me more about you being named Hero of the Year by CNN in 2013?

**A:** *Being named CNN Hero of the Year was a huge honor for me, and I was completely taken aback by it. It has brought a lot of attention to our organization and highlighted what we do to a huge audience.*

**Q:** Is it true that Lenny Kravitz wrote a song just for you?

**A:** *It is true that I inspired Lenny Kravitz to write a song, at least that is what he told me and put in his press release. It is called "Can We Find a Reason" on Album No. 5. It is the last track of the album because his band saw me on an interview and thought what we were doing was cool, I told him more about it, he thought it was awesome and decided*

*to write a song, and it all went from that point.*

**Q:** Who were YOUR mentors/those who inspired you in life?

**A:** *Certainly, my dad is one of them, he is very persistent at all he does. My mom is another, she is tenacious; they always were my inspiration to never give up and keep working for what I wanted. Ted Nugent too, of course...I am joking!*

**Q:** What are you most proud of relative to LL&W?

**A:** *I am most proud of the number of wonderful people I have been able to work side by side with over the past 25 years, from the crew to volunteers and sponsors, you cannot meet any better people. Second, would be the overall clean-up operation we have built with our barges and education classroom.*

**Q:** What do you see for the next 25 years for LL&W or other projects?

**A:** *A lot more results! ❖*



**Photo A:** Living Lands & Waters (LL&W) Founder and President Chad Pregracke.

**Photo B:** Chad Pregracke and more than 120,000 volunteers have removed more than 12 million pounds of garbage in 25 rivers since LL&W's start.

**Photo C:** Chad's wife, Tammy Becker, receives a trophy for her strong work as LL&W's Education Coordinator.

**Photo D:** Chad chats with volunteers and supporters at LL&W's barge party held June 16 in Moline, IL.

**Photo E:** A special cake for a special celebration.



# WCI HOLDS ANNUAL MEDIA TOUR 2022

**W**CI's Senior Vice President Deb Calhoun and Director of Government Relations Dustin Davidson led WCI's annual media tour for reporters that began on Sunday, August 6 with a group dinner in Alton, IL.

Media attendees, who traveled from North Dakota, New York and Washington, DC, included Noah Wicks, *Agri-Pulse*; Eric Haun, *Marine News*; Jerry Hagstrom, *The Hagstrom Report/National Journal*; David Murray and John Shoulberg, *Waterways Journal*; and David Carson and Gabe Barnard, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Industry and stakeholder representatives Angela Grett, Ingram Barge Company; Wendy Brannen and Jordan Bright, American Soybean Association; and Matt Zeigler, National Corn Growers Association, also joined the tour.

On day one, the media tour included a briefing by Ken Buchholz, Center Director, at the Audubon Center at Riverlands and Andrew Schimpf, P.E., Rivers Project Manager, Corps of Engineers Navigation Business Line Manager, followed by a tour of Mel Price Locks and Dam. Tour participants were also treated to a towboat ride aboard the *M/V Mike Weisand* courtesy of American Commercial Barge Line (ACBL). Before boarding the vessel, a briefing was provided by ACBL COO Patrick Sutton and Vice President of Government Affairs Martin Hettel. The day concluded with a lively dinner at the legendary, and cash-only, Fast Eddie's.

Day two included a briefing and tour of Lock and Dam 25 with the Corps' St. Louis District Commander Col. Kevin Golinghorst; Deputy District Engineer, Project Management John Peukert; NESP Regional Program Manager Andrew Goodall, and NESP Project Manager Jose Lopez. ❖



**Photo A:** Corps St. Louis District Commander Col. Kevin Golinghorst discusses upcoming construction at Lock 25 and NESP on day two of the WCI media tour.

**Photo B:** Andrew Schimpf, P.E., Rivers Project Manager, Corps of Engineers Navigation Business Line Manager, briefed reporters at the Audubon Center at Riverlands. Ken Buchholz, Center Director, also welcomed attendees and discussed the importance of the Navigation & Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP), ecosystem restoration and wetlands.

**Photo C:** WCI member company ACBL provided a boat ride for media participants aboard the *M/V Mike Weisand*, with ACBL COO Patrick Sutton discussing the importance of the inland waterways in the transportation supply chain.

**Photo D:** ACBL COO Patrick Sutton

**Photo E:** This year's WCI media tour participants traveled from as far away as North Dakota, New York and Washington, DC.

**Photo F:** WCI Director of Government Relations Dustin Davidson is interviewed about WCI's mission and legislative work during the media tour.



# WCI TO HOLD 19TH ANNUAL WATERWAYS SYMPOSIUM AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING IN PADUCAH

WCI will hold its 19th Annual Waterways Symposium and Board of Directors Meeting in Paducah, Kentucky, in coordination with the Seamen’s Church Institute River Bell Awards luncheon, and co-sponsored by *Waterways Journal*. Events will be held at the Paducah-McCracken County Convention & Expo Center, with WCI events held Wednesday, December 7 and concluding the morning of Thursday December 8, and the SCI River Bell beginning at 11 a.m. on December 8. ❖



For the first time, Paducah is the site of WCI’s Annual Waterways Symposium and Board of Directors meeting December 7–8. Paducah is located at the confluence of the Tennessee and the Ohio rivers, halfway between St. Louis and Nashville. Twenty blocks of the city’s downtown have been designated as a historic district and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Dr. Arthur Laffer will speak at WCI’s Waterways Symposium on December 7. Dr. Laffer’s economic acumen and influence in triggering a worldwide tax-cutting movement in the 1980s earned him the distinction as “The Father of Supply-Side Economics.” He was a member of President Reagan’s Economic Policy Advisory Board for both of his two terms (1981–1989). He was also a member of the Executive Committee of the Reagan/Bush Finance Committee in 1984 and was a founding member of the Reagan Executive Advisory Committee for the presidential race of 1980. He also advised Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher on fiscal policy in the UK during the 1980s.

## Wednesday, December 7, 2022

**7:30 – 8:30 a.m.** Buffet Breakfast

**8:30 – 11:30 a.m.** WCI Annual Membership/Board of Directors Meeting

*WCI Members Only*

**11:00 a.m.** Annual Waterways Symposium Registration Opens

**11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.** Lunch and Keynote Speaker: 2022 Elections

- Nathan Gonzales, *Editor and Publisher, Inside Elections*

**1:00 – 1:45 p.m.** Economic Outlook

- Dr. Arthur Laffer, *Economist, Former Economic Policy Advisor to President Reagan*

**2:00 – 2:45 p.m.** Dredging Panel

- Jase Ousley, *Geologist, Regional Sediment Management Center of Expertise, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (invited)*

**2:45 – 3:30 p.m.** Agriculture Outlook

- Cary B. Sifferath, *Vice President, U.S. Grains Council*

**4:30 – 6:30 p.m.** Opening Reception | **1857 Hotel, 210 Kentucky Avenue, Paducah, KY**

**6:30 p.m.** Dinner | **On Your Own**

## Thursday, December 8, 2022

**7:30 – 8:30 a.m.** Buffet Breakfast

**8:30 – 9:15 a.m.** Energy Outlook

- Joe Craft, *Chairman, President, and CEO, Alliance Resource Partners*

**9:15 – 10:30 a.m.** Navigation Construction Projects Status Update

- NESP: Andrew Goodall, *P.E., P.M.P., NESP Regional Program Manager, Rock Island District, USACE*
- Kentucky Lock: Bob Winters, *P.M.P., Project Manager – Programs and Project Delivery Branch, Nashville District, USACE (invited)*
- Upper Ohio Navigation Study: Stephen R. Fritz, *P.E., P.M.P., MEGA Projects Program Manager, Pittsburgh District, USACE (invited)*

**11:00 a.m.** Seamen’s Church Institute River Bell Awards Luncheon Begins (Paducah-McCracken County Convention & Expo Center). Separate registration required.

# 'MODERN DAY HUCK FINN' CANOES SOLO FROM OREGON TO NEW YORK

By Deb Calhoun, Editor

On August 17, at the [River Discovery Center](#) in Paducah, Kentucky, I had the pleasure of meeting and interviewing explorer and author Neal Moore, who spent 22 months solo canoeing 22 rivers across 22 states from Oregon to New York. He is the only person to canoe solo in an open canoe across the United States from West to East in a single voyage.

From Los Angeles, at the request of his mother, Moore went to perform missionary work in the then-volatile South Africa in the 1990s. He later graduated from the University of Utah with a degree in English Literature and moved to Taiwan – where he currently resides – to teach English in Taipei.

The idea to undertake the 7,500-mile journey in a 16-foot canoe was borne from wanderlust but also from a paddle trip from the headwaters of the Mississippi River over 2,300 miles across the midsection of the United States in 2009. His book, *Down the Mississippi* (2012), chronicles that journey.



*Deb Calhoun interviews Neal Moore at the River Discovery Center in Paducah, KY.*

With that as a backdrop, and COVID-19 just beginning to appear in 2020, the idea to do a larger solo trip was now gaining interest. Living in Taiwan, “as an expat, it was like an epiphany when I realized that adventure could be in my (U.S.) backyard and not across the globe,” he said.

Moore was “In search of how rivers connect all the way across America, as well as how communities connect, how we can come together as a nation. To explore the ties that bind us together,” according to his website [22rivers](#).

After a year of planning for the trip, he set out on February 9, 2020 from Astoria, Oregon and concluded 675 days later on December 14, 2021 as he entered New York Harbor to see Lady Liberty standing tall before him.

His journey would take him from the West to East Coasts, with about 500

miles of portage (pulling his canoe on wheels and gear around the Continental Divide and other stops where it was not navigable to camp or stay in communities). Perhaps as a metaphor for his adventurous somewhat unconventional life, on much of this trip he was paddling in a more challenging reverse, up-stream direction. The start of the trip in Oregon at the mouth of the Columbia River was full of peril, as the Pacific Ocean pushes up hard against the river, to the equally difficult Snake River and Clark Fork River.

From the Pacific Northwest river system, he paddled 3,599 river miles over eight months from Helena, Montana down the Missouri River to St. Louis and down the mighty Mississippi River to the gulf in New Orleans.

He paddled around the Barrier Islands in Mississippi and Alabama, up the Mobile, Tombigbee, and Tennessee-Tombigbee



*Neal Moore circles the Statue of Liberty at the end of his two-year, 7500-mile canoe journey across the United States, December 14, 2021. Photo courtesy of James R. Peipert.*

**Continued on page 11**



# ‘MODERN DAY HUCK FINN’ CANOES SOLO FROM OREGON TO NEW YORK

Continued from page 10



*This was Moore’s second stop in Paducah, his first was on the solo canoe trip.*

then headed up the Ohio River – with side jaunts up and down the Kentucky River and Kanawha River in Kentucky and West Virginia, and then to the source of the Ohio River, up the Allegheny and across Lake Chautauqua.

Next, Moore entered Lake Erie, with its dangerous waves and currents that have influenced books and songs like “The Wreck of the Edmond Fitzgerald.” From Lake Erie he paddled toward Syracuse, the Catskills, West Point, and eventually Manhattan on the Hudson River in New York City.

In each town that he stopped, he would get intel on what he was to face on the next river segment from locals –

“characters” – who had lived on, traveled, or fished the rivers or lakes sometimes for their entire lives. He would paddle through three winters and celebrate his 50th birthday while on the trip.

Moore went through several locks on the inland waterways system and faced a scary moment at night on the Mississippi River when winds and heavy rain pushed him close to a 15-barge tow despite his efforts to paddle away from it toward an island. The towboat captain saw Moore and directed his spotlight toward the island to literally light the way for him to get to safe harbor. “People on towboats know the river like a religion,” he said. “Canoes were the first form of transportation, and the rivers were the first thoroughfares,” he noted.

His greatest moment on the journey was near Horn Island and Petit Bois off the coast of Mississippi where his canoe was bumped hard several times by bull sharks, with dolphins and pelicans escorting his way toward the islands where he camped for the night.

Of the experience, Moore said he learned even more how the waterways connect communities, and how to try to embrace wilderness around you in nature but also recognize it inside of you. Calling the trip “life-affirming,” he said, “while sometimes it is mentally hard to do, I was able to detach and let go on the water.”

Moore’s canoe now hangs in a friend’s brew pub, sure to spark conversation among revelers and maybe even inspire a future journey for those in the mood to wander.



## GETTING DEEP

On August 16, Louisiana state and local leaders met to commemorate the completion of the first of two phases of a \$250 million project to deepen to a maximum draft of 50 feet the Mississippi River to allow Panamax-size vessels to navigate to the state’s ports. WCI member The Big River Coalition hosted the event and has worked tirelessly for a decade with state and local leaders, the Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies on efforts to deepen the river.



**DREDGING THE MISSISSIPPI**  
**STATE LEADERS CELEBRATE DEEPENING OF MISSISSIPPI**

## PROGRESS IN PA



On August 23, Pennsylvania Senator Bob Casey (left) welcomed Mitch Landrieu (right), White House Senior Advisor & Infrastructure Implementation Coordinator, to Beaver County, Pennsylvania to see construction progress on the Montgomery Lock and Dam. Funding from the Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act “will help engineers complete significant improvements to this key part of the region's economy,” Senator Casey said. Photo by Senator Bob Casey.



Former WCI Chairman Peter Stephaich (Chairman/CEO at Campbell Transportation Co. Inc.) (left) stands with Mitch Landrieu at Montgomery Lock.

## 2022 INDUSTRY CALENDAR

**September 26-27:** America's Watershed Initiative Annual Meeting (St. Louis)

**October 11:** 2022 Tennessee River Valley Association/ Tennessee-Cumberland Waterways Council Annual Meeting. (Franklin, TN)

**October 12-13:** AWO 2022 Board of Directors Meeting and Fall Convention (The Diplomat, Hollywood, FL)

**October 26-28:** National Waterways Conference 2022 Annual Meeting (Houston, TX)

**November 29-30:** AWO Executive Committee Meeting (Arlington, VA)

**November 30-December 2:** International WorkBoat Show (New Orleans)

**December 7-8:** WCI Annual Waterways Symposium//Board of Directors Meeting (Paducah, KY)

**December 8:** Seamen's Church Institute River Bell Awards (Paducah, KY)

### 2023

**February 14-16:** WCI Washington Meeting and Capitol Hill Fly-In (Washington, DC)



Photo by Louis Velazquez on Unsplash

Capitol Currents  
is published by



**WATERWAYS**  
COUNCIL, INC.

Tracy Zea, Publisher  
Deb Calhoun, Editor

499 S. Capitol Street, SW  
Suite 401  
Washington, DC 20003  
202.765.2166

waterwayscouncil.org

Vol. 19, No. 3