



History 20 years in the making

In 2018, the Olmsted Lock & Dam ribbon cutting was held and the project is now operational.



History is often defined as the study of change over time, and as Waterways Council Inc. (WCI) commemorates its 20th anniversary this year, we celebrate the successful changes to the inland waterways transportation system over our two decades.

A bit of a WCI history lesson: the organization began in the early 2000s as a campaign called *Waterways Work!* that was created to help spend down a growing surplus in the Inland Waterways Trust Fund (IWTF) to modernize the inland system, bring positive attention to the importance of the inland waterways and its infrastructure, and provide some support to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which was being criticized regularly in the news media.

After the success of that effort, *Waterways Work!* merged with DINAMO, the Association for the Development of Inland Navigation in America's Ohio Valley, to create Waterways Council, Inc., a national organization advocating for a modern, efficient, well-funded inland waterways and ports system. Soon after, WCI merged with MARC 2000 (the Midwest Area River Coalition).

Some of the successes that have occurred

over WCI's tenure include:

2007: First Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) in seven years required a veto override, and included program authorization for the Navigation & Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP)

2009: \$430 million is provided for inland navigation construction projects from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)

2010: First Capital Investment Strategy is completed

2012: WCI effectively urged expediting removal of rock pinnacles during low water on Mississippi River

2014: Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA) enacted Olmsted cost-share change, and Congress approved the industry-supported 45% diesel fuel tax increase on commercial operators to inject additional investment toward the IWTF

2015-2018: Annual Appropriations: Several additional construction cost-share changes were enacted, and overall funding for the Corps increased each year

2016: WRDA authorized the Upper Ohio Navigation Project

2018: Olmsted ribbon cutting held, project operational

2020: WRDA adjusted construction cost-share to 65%/35%

2021: Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act (IIJA) infrastructure package provided \$2.5 billion for inland waterways construction

Presently, WCI is focusing on securing fiscal year 2024 Energy & Water Development appropriations for the full amount supportable by annual diesel fuel tax receipts deposited into the IWTF. At press time, this was still being debated in Congress.

We also worked to overcome bureaucratic hurdles for the Bayou Sorrel Lock, to begin the Corps' 3x3x3 study (to complete within three years at a total cost of under \$3 million and involve all three levels of Corps review—district, division and headquarters) phase.

Foundationally, WCI will continue to oppose additional tolling, lockage fees, or other harmful charges for users of the inland waterways system, and in WRDA 2024 legislation we will work toward a provision that all projects funded by IIJA remain 100% federal, as per Congressional intent in IIJA.

In addition to our legislative successes, WCI has developed an extensive network of stakeholder members around the country who help advocate for our positions and policies. Our grassroots outreach has grown more sophisticated, complementing our in-person meetings on Capitol Hill and back home with digital advocacy outreach tools available 24/7. WCI has also become a key source of information to the news media and on social media about infrastructure, low water, and the industry overall.

WCI's history has shaped our present and our future and has significantly improved the inland waterways transportation system.

We are humbled by our beginnings, and we embrace the future with the vigor and passion and stick-to-it-ness we have always brought to bear. WCI thanks its members and supporters for joining us on the 20-year ride. Stay aboard—there is lots more to see and do ahead!



TRACY R. ZEA
President/CEO,
Waterways Council Inc.