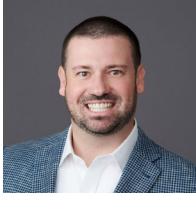


# Inland Insider

*Make it or break it time for inland waterways*



BY TRACY ZEA

*Tracy Zea is president and CEO of the Waterways Council, Inc., the national public policy organization advocating for a modern and well-maintained national system of ports and inland waterways.*

For the last 11 fiscal years, Congress has provided an additional \$5.1 billion above the president's annual budget requests for the inland waterways' construction program. Despite this significant financial investment from both the taxpayers and the users of the inland waterways, the only completed project is Olmsted Lock and Dam. There are six active navigation construction projects, five projects in active design, and eight projects awaiting funding to begin design.

Fiscal year (FY) 2025 presents an opportunity for the inland waterways' construction program. There are a total of 19 authorized construction projects that are all critical to the nation's economy. If constructed, these projects will enable U.S. shippers to compete, both domestically and in the world marketplace. Congress, in both the House and Senate

Energy and Water Appropriations bills, provided \$423 million for inland waterways' construction in FY25. However, due to a reduction in the amount of funding provided for the Army Corps of Engineers' program in FY25 through the continuing resolution process, inland waterways construction projects are at risk of being delayed or halted if the Corps decides to ignore inland waterways construction.

Failure to fund Montgomery Lock (Ohio River) at \$205 million in FY25 will spur a backlog of construction funding of over \$1 billion in FY27 alone to fund ongoing construction efficiently. Expecting \$1 billion through annual appropriations in any fiscal year for this program is exceedingly ambitious. The absence of funding in FY25 will result in project cost increases and significantly delayed operational dates. There is an opportunity in FY25 and FY26 for the Corps to fund work at Montgomery Lock and Chickamauga Lock (Tennessee River) to completion, respectively, which would pave the way to ensure completion of Kentucky Lock (Tennessee River) and start construction of Lock and Dam 25 (Mississippi River) in FY27.

The Corps now has the option of funding Montgomery Lock at \$205 million, setting up for success the inland waterways construction program in the future. Leaving Montgomery Lock out of the FY25 Work Plan would set the entire program back several years, perhaps even a decade or more.

# Credentialing Insight

*Homeport: Vital digital infrastructure*



BY NATE GILMAN

*Nate Gilman, president of MM-SEAS USCG Licensing Software, uses his hawsepiping experience to support mariners and workforce development. Connect on LinkedIn.*

The Coast Guard's Homeport platform, providing access to the National Maritime Center's Merchant Mariner Licensing Database (MMLD), is vital digital infrastructure that's often overlooked. Its importance, and the tools it provides, became strikingly clear when Homeport experienced an unexpected public outage beginning March 4, 2025.

Two essential tools for keeping our vessels staffed within Homeport are the Credential Verification Tool and the Application Status Tool. These are crucial for ensuring a qualified workforce and maintaining maritime sector integrity.

The Homeport Credential Verification Tool allows employers to instantly confirm that a mariner has the necessary certifications to operate their vessels safely and legally. This system also helps employers validate credentials, protecting

against potential security threats and preventing compliance issues and penalties during Coast Guard, DNV, and American Bureau of Shipping inspections and audits.

Imagine the risk of an unverified airline pilot in the cockpit. The Homeport Credential Verification Tool mitigates similar risks on our waterways.

The Homeport Application Status Tool offers transparency for mariners pursuing career advancement, enabling them to plan their timing for employment more effectively. Additionally, crewing managers can reliably staff their vessels, knowing when approved personnel will be available. Mariner credentials are often approved in the U.S. by the Homeport Application Status Tool one to two weeks before their physical Merchant Mariner Credential arrives, meaning they can get to work sooner. This can have a big impact, because at \$300 a day for an able seaman, an ordinary seaman working their way up could lose approximately \$4,200 waiting for the hard copy to arrive.

Together, the Homeport Credential Verification Tool and Homeport Application Status Tool significantly improve economic security and workforce development. They allow both mariners and employers to operate efficiently.

These aren't just technical details; they are essential for supporting a qualified maritime workforce and ensuring safe, secure waterways — a benefit for the nation. A functional Homeport and MMLD system is an investment in a stronger, safer America.