

MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION TO FOLLOW CORN BELT PORTS, FORM MAJOR PORT REGION

By Dr. Anshu Singh, Director of Sustainability and Conservation for the Corn Belt Ports



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On April 20, 2022, the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission (MRRPC) in La Crosse, Wisconsin, submitted a Letter of Intent as the non-federal sponsor to the U.S. Waterborne Commerce Statistics Center to form a port statistical area called the Northern Grain Belt Ports (NGBP) that encompasses 11 riverfront counties between Wisconsin and Minnesota. It includes the historic river cities of Red Wing, Wabasha, and Winona in Minnesota, and the port cities of La Crosse and Prairie du Chien in Wisconsin.

This regional effort is modeled after the Tri-State (IL, MO, IA) port regions to the south that are in the Heart of the Corn Belt above Mel Price Locks and Dam. The Corn Belt Ports were federally recognized as port statistical areas in 2020/21 and includes the Upper Mississippi River Ports (UMRP) of Iowa and Illinois, the Mid-America Port Commission (MAPC), and the Illinois Waterway (ILWW) Ports. The UMRP is centered on the I-74

and I-80 intersections with the Upper Mississippi River and handled 8.4 million tons of freight in 2020, the same size as the port of Miami, FL. The MAPC is at the confluence of the Illinois and Upper Mississippi Rivers, includes the two I-72 interstate crossings, and handled 15 million tons of freight making it the 41st largest port in the United States, earning a spot on Global Trade Magazine's annual "Top 50 Power Ports List" in 2021. The newly created ILWW includes ten riverfront counties and five existing ports that are serviced by I-74, I-39, I-55, and I-80 and handle 14.9 million tons of freight, making it the 42nd largest port, similar in size to the Port of Boston, MA. The adjacent Joliet Regional Port District on the Illinois Waterway handled 8.6 million tons, similar in size to the port of Miami. The Corn Belt Ports are the collective equivalent of the largest inland port in the nation, based on tonnage.

Similar to each Corn Belt Port, the NGBP is tracking to be a Top 50 U.S. Port based on the tonnage and a Top 10 Inland Port. Likewise, the NGBP supports the development of rural and non-rural multi-modal transportation and natural infrastructure. It centers on an Interstate Highway intersection (I-90) with the Upper Mississippi River. It aligns with an existing regional planning agency, a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), economic



development organizations, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers District responsibilities. Chris Smith, the Director of the Operations for the Corn Belt Ports who shares lessons learned from the Corn Belt Ports Initiative with the MRRPC, said "The Northern Grain Belt Ports will encourage integrated regional transportation planning, and ecosystem restoration and sustainability efforts."

Robert Sinkler, a Senior Advisor with Dawson & Associates, the nation's premier firm for resolving complex challenges involving federal water and environmental policy, contemplated the federal recognition of ports in the Upper Mississippi River Basin, based on an article in the August 1, 2019 issue of *Waterways Journal* titled, "Quad Cities Are Loaded With Port Potential." Since then, the Corn Belt Ports team created the Corn

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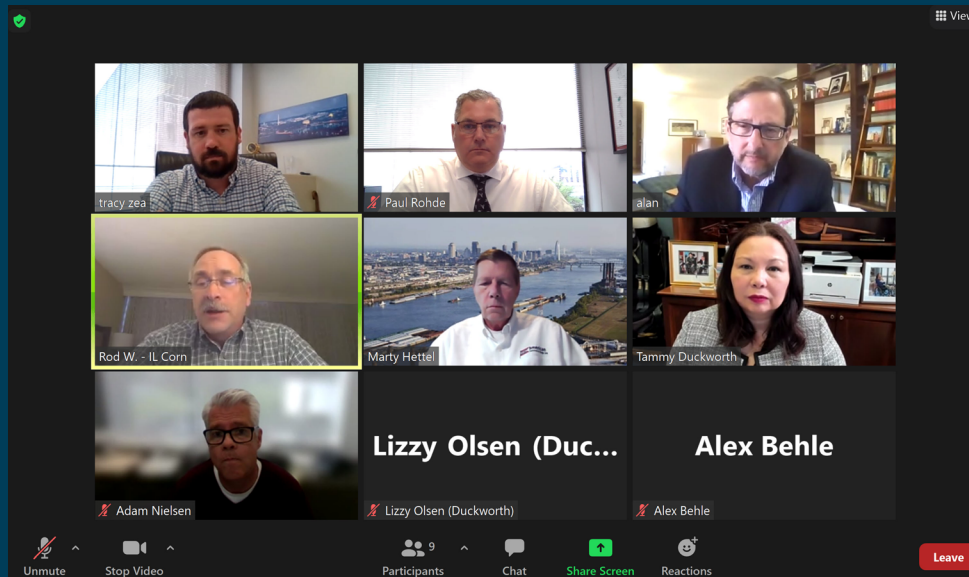
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Belt Ports and are now helping advance similar initiatives outside of the Tri-State (IL, MO IA) region. Sinkler frequently said, “You can’t invest in a port that doesn’t exist.”

We are seeing increased federal, state, and non-profit organization investments in the Upper Mississippi River Basin above Mel

Price Locks and Dam since the federal port recognition efforts. This includes investments in both transportation and natural infrastructure for a unique region that is designated by Congress, “as both a nationally significant ecosystem and a nationally significant navigation system.”

It is the only inland river in the United States to be designated as such. We are all looking forward to welcoming the Northern Grain Belt Ports to the growing regional ports family, and the value it will bring to waterborne commerce and the aquatic ecosystems on the Upper Mississippi River system. ❖



On April 28, WCI members and staff met with Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), an unwavering supporter of NESP and the inland waterways. Left to right from top: Mr. Zea; WCI Vice President-Midwest Paul Rohde; Alan Goldstein (Law Office of Alan Goldstein); Rodney Weinzierl (Illinois Corn Growers Association); Marty Hettel (ACBL); Senator Duckworth; Adam Nielsen (Illinois Farm Bureau).



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WCI has developed a new logo for WCI members to display on your websites to show you are a proud part of our organization. The logo will be sent by request only. If you would like to receive the logo, please email WCI Vice President Paul Rohde, prohde@waterwayscouncil.org. Thank you!