

Corn Belt Ports Expand. The Northern Grain Belt Ports are Federally Approved and Now Join the List of Regional Ports in the Heart of the Corn Belt Going in to 2023

January 5, 2023



Corn Belt Ports

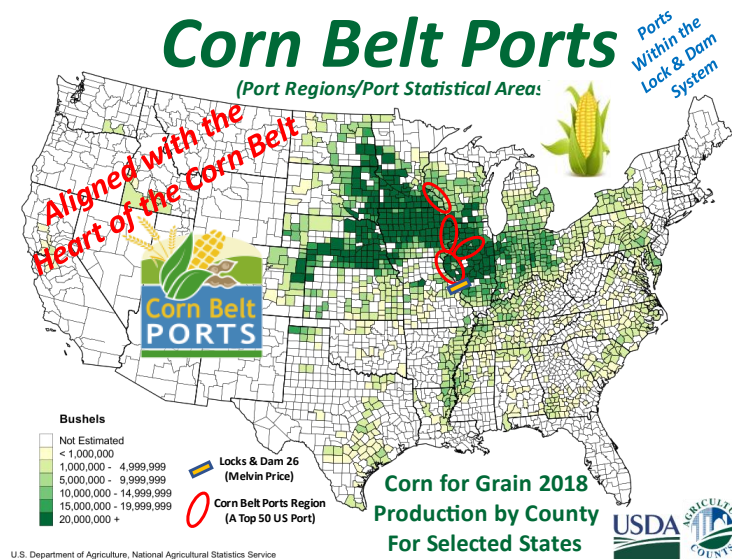
The Ports Within the Corn Belt's Lock and Dam System

IL, MO, IA, WI & MN

MEDIA RELEASE #9

The Northern Grain Belt Ports (NGBP) on the Upper Mississippi River Between Wisconsin and Minnesota were approved by the U.S. Waterborne Commerce Statistics Center and the Navigation and Civil Works Decision Support Center on December 8, 2022, to be listed and ranked on the annual U.S. Leading Ports List. The NGBP is solidly a Top 100 U.S. Port and is now similar in size to the Port of Miami based on freight tonnage. This designation will make the region more competitive for federal government, state government, and non-profit organization investment. This marks the first time in history that Wisconsin's ports on the Upper Mississippi River are federally listed and ranked, like Wisconsin's ports on the Great Lakes. This also completes the grass roots effort that began in the fall of 2019 to federally recognize the ports and terminals in America's most significant grain producing and exporting region. In 2019 the Corn Belt Ports collectively handled 96 million tons of cargo on the Upper Mississippi River and the Illinois Waterway System. The Corn Belt Ports are an essential part of the global supply chain.

The Corn Belt Ports are the federally recognized Ports in the Heart of the Corn Belt above Locks and Dam 26 (see map). More simply, the Corn Belt Ports are the ports within the Corn Belt's Lock and Dam System. They have attracted over \$1.25 Billion in additional transportation and natural infrastructure investment since 2021 from federal and state government organizations, and non-profit organizations.



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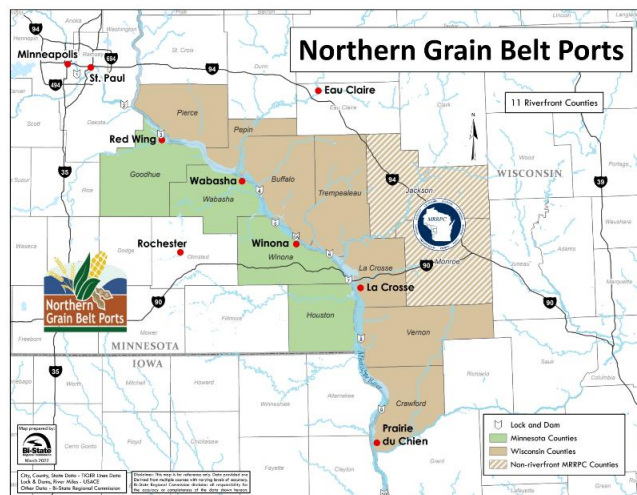
The Corn Belt Ports consist of the following four regional ports:

The Mid-America Port Commission (MAPC) is defined by the confluence of the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers, and is centered on the Quincy-Hannibal, IL-MO area. It includes the I-72 intersection with both the Upper Mississippi River and the Illinois Waterway. The MAPC was first federally listed and ranked in 2020.

The Upper Mississippi River Ports (UMRP) (IL & IA) is managed by a collaboration of five regional planning agencies, is centered on the Quad Cities, and includes riverfront counties north to the port city of Dubuque. It includes the I-74, I-80 and I-280 intersections with the Upper Mississippi River. The UMRP was first federally listed and ranked in 2020.

The Illinois Waterway (ILWW) Ports are centered on the river cities of Peoria and Ottawa and includes ten counties within three regional planning agencies and encompasses 175.5 River Miles. The ILWW Ports include the Havana, Heart of Illinois, Illinois Valley, Ottawa, and Seneca Regional Port Districts. And, they partner with the Joliet Regional Port District to advance common ILWW goals. It includes the I-474, I-74, I-180, I-39, I-55, and I-80 intersections with the Illinois Waterway. The ILWW Ports was first federally listed and ranked in 2021.

The Northern Grain Belt Ports (NGBP) are centered on the I-90 crossing of the Upper Mississippi River and includes the historic inland port cities of La Crosse and Prairie du Chien in Wisconsin, and the ports of Red Wing, Wabasha, and Winona in Minnesota. It includes 7 counties in Wisconsin and 4 counties in Minnesota. The NGBP works closely with the separate ports and terminals in the Minneapolis-St. Paul urban area to advance common regional goals. The NGBP was first federally listed and ranked in 2022. See map.



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The Corn Belt Ports Objectives:

- All collectively are the equivalent of the Top Inland Port in the Nation based on freight tonnage
- All individually are a Top 50 Principal U.S. Port based on freight tonnage
- All individually are a Top 10 Inland Port
- All are on *Global Trade Magazine's* annual "Top 50 Power Ports List"
- The Mid-America Port Commission is the largest port on the Upper Mississippi River
- The Mid-America Port Commission is the 2nd largest inland port (behind St. Louis) on the entire Mississippi River

The Corn Belt Ports Measures of Success:

- Increase port region tonnage (economic value of goods); which also translates to jobs.
- Bring in additional / increased (Federal, State and Non-Profit Organization) investment measured in dollars; which also translates to jobs.
- Create new and / or expand existing waterborne commerce and river-related companies, businesses, and industries (includes things like ecotourism); which also translates to jobs.
- Increase and / or improve aquatic habitat which is measured in acres or river mile/side channel connectivity; which also translates to jobs.
- Incorporate climate change resiliency into existing water resources infrastructure measured in number of projects; which also translates to jobs.
- Reduce Green House Gas (GHG) emissions (measured in tons) by moving more freight to the waterways.

2023 Priorities:

- **Add Calhoun County, IL to the Mid-America Port Commission Port Statistical Area.** Currently Calhoun County is the only Upper Mississippi River Riverfront County in the Mid-America Port Commission Region not part of a federally recognized Port Statistical Area (PSA). It is critical that Calhoun County tonnage be appropriately tracked in the Mid-America Port Commission Area, especially since 2 of the 3 Corn Belt Port's top priority 1200' lock retrofits are on dams in Calhoun County, and Lincoln County directly across the River in Missouri is included in the Mid-America Port Commission PSA.

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- **Add Greene County, IL to the Mid-America Port Commission Port Statistical Area.** Currently Greene County is the only riverfront county on the Illinois Waterway that is not in a federally recognized port statistical area. This is causing the tonnage on the Illinois waterway to be underrepresented.
- **Expand the current Minneapolis-St. Paul Urban Port to include 4-7 Urban Riverfront Counties.** Currently up to 50% of the freight tonnage being shipped in and out of the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Area is not being attributed to a federally recognized port, which undervalues the impact of waterborne commerce in the urban region. This closes the “port gaps” in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Area of Minnesota.
- **Develop and implement a strategy to accelerate retrofitting 7 existing 1930s-era dams with 1200’ locks** that were authorized for Construction by Congress in 2007.
- **Accelerate delivery of ecosystem restoration projects part of the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program.** Focus on areas that have been underserved by the Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program.
- **Ensure there is a program in place to reduce infrastructure risk from current and future climate-informed river conditions in the Corn Belt Ports Region.** Update engineering standards as appropriate.
- **Better align federal, state, county, and city port entities throughout the Corn Belt Ports Region.** This will enable better coordination, synchronization, and communication on a wide range of efforts.

Featured Quotes:

Kirsten Wallace, Executive Director of the **Upper Mississippi River Basin Association**, said, “The ports and terminals, riverfront cities and counties, and regional planning agencies that are located within the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway System are important Upper Mississippi River Basin stakeholder groups. Understanding important navigation metrics such as annual freight tonnage information shipped from ports and terminals, enables us to make informed decisions on a wide range of issues.”

Robert Sinkler, the **Executive Coordinating Director for the Corn Belt Ports**, stated, “There was a conspicuous absence of federally recognized ports between Wisconsin and Minnesota on the Upper Mississippi River. The recent federal recognition of the Northern Grain Belt Ports fills this gap. It is hard to invest in a port that doesn’t exist, so the Corn Belt Ports team is very glad that the Northern Grain Belt Ports are now finally on the map. Navigable waterways without inland ports are just a big river, but navigable waterways with inland ports are an essential part of our national and global supply chains. Farmers in the region did need a federally recognized port of loading.”

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The **Secretary of Transportation for Wisconsin**, the Honorable Craig Thompson, said in his letter of support for the NGBP application that “The Northern Grain Belt Port Statistical Area has been functioning for over 200 years as a port region, but it does not have federal recognition like many other significant areas on the inland waterway navigation system, such as the [Upper] Mississippi River Ports [Illinois and Iowa] PSA, the Illinois Waterway Ports... PSA, and the Mid-America Port Commission PSA, each of which has been federally recognized in recent years. Lack of a defined PSA denies the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, the MRRPC, and riverfront counties from getting annual access to tailored and packaged statistical data and information that would help ensure the region maintains a nationally and globally competitive multi-modal transportation system, a strong regional economy, and sustainable water resources infrastructure that supports both people and the environment.”

The **Secretary of Transportation for Minnesota**, the Honorable Nancy Daubenberger, stated in her letter of support for the NGBP application that “The Northern Grain Belt PSA has been functioning for over 200-years as a port region but does not have federal recognition like many other significant areas on the inland waterway navigation system. The [Upper Mississippi River Ports (Illinois and Iowa)] PSA, the Illinois Waterway Ports... PSA and the Mid-America Port Commission PSA have been federally recognized in recent years. The Northern Grain Belt PSA recognition will help raise the profile of this area, make it more competitive and serve as a valuable economic development tool for the region.”

Chris Smith, **Director of Operations for the Corn Belt Ports** and **project manager for establishing the Northern Grain Belt Ports** remarked, “It will help attract more investment to the Upper Mississippi River Between Wisconsin and Minnesota now that the Northern Grain Belt Ports are listed and ranked like the Great Lakes ports in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Our strategy has been to capture the freight tonnage handled in the Northern Grain Belt Ports area and translate that into increased direct and indirect investment for both transportation and natural infrastructure in our region.”

Bob Gollnik, the **Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission’s** lead planner for the Northern Grain Belt Ports stated that “the initial endorsement and support provided by the La Crosse Joint Board of Harbor Commissioners helped to reinforce the importance of this effort. Their acknowledgement that not all tonnage reported in Minnesota and Wisconsin is attributed to a federally recognized port, underrepresented the value of waterborne commerce to the region. It does not represent the value of the region to our national and global supply chains.”

Dr. Anshu Singh, **Director of Sustainability and Conservation for the Northern Grain Belt Ports and the thought leader behind the concept of the Corn Belt Ports** made the remark, “We are thrilled that we now have Federally recognized transportation reaches on the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway System that enables us to effectively implement Interagency

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Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) at watershed scale. Sustainability and natural infrastructure are at the very heart of the Corn Belt Ports.”

Peter Fletcher, the Executive Director of the **La Crosse Area Planning Committee** said, "The approval of the NGBP will help to further demonstrate the economic value of the region and the importance of the bi-state waterborne commerce to the regional, national and global supply chains. We believe that it will create opportunities for direct and indirect investment into the region’s multi-modal transportation and natural infrastructure."

Nicole Wagner, Executive Director of the **Wisconsin Corn Growers Association** remarked, “Federal approval of the NGBP application directly supports our goal to increase investment in our aging multi-modal transportation infrastructure to further increase regional profitability and market development.”

Adam Birr, Executive Director, **Minnesota Corn Growers Association** stated, “The approval of the NGBP helps to raise the bi-state region’s profile to improve regional, national and global visibility and competitiveness which provides a competitive edge to attract a wide range of public and private investment. Ultimately this promotes opportunities for Minnesota’s 24,000 corn farmers while building connections with the non-farming public.”

The **Minnesota and Wisconsin agriculture organizations** (Wisconsin Corn Growers Association, Minnesota Corn Growers Association, Midwest Food Products Association, Midwest-SouthEastern Equipment Dealers Association, Minnesota AgriGrowth Council, Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation, Minnesota Farmers Union, Minnesota Soybean Growers Association, Wisconsin Agri-Business Association, Wisconsin Association of Professional Agriculture Consultants, Wisconsin Biofuels Association, Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, Wisconsin Soybean Association) in a jointly signed letter of support for the approval of the NGBP stated; “This bi-state section of the Upper Mississippi River has been a functioning regional port system for over 100 years without federal recognition. Wisconsin is currently the only state on the Mississippi River without a federally recognized port. It is also difficult to determine what waterborne commerce activity is taking place in Western Wisconsin and Eastern Minnesota to support bi-state, regional economic development, and transportation planning efforts. The Northern Grain Belt Port Statistical Area initiative corrects that.”

Honey Zimmerman, DBA, Assistant **Professor of Supply Chain Management at Western Illinois University**, remarked, “Managing and tracking transportation data by logical, regional transportation segments on our waterways will enable the multi-state region to make better multi-modal transportation decisions and further enhance global supply chain networks. The Corn Belt Ports framework will also help raise awareness of the important value of waterborne commerce in America’s Heartland.”

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Denise Bulat, The Executive Director of the **Bi-State Regional Commission between Illinois and Iowa**, and the primary transportation planning lead for establishing the **Upper Mississippi River Ports (Illinois and Iowa)**, remarked, “We are pleased that the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission to our north has created a port structure similar to ours, between Wisconsin and Minnesota. That will assist us in more effectively attracting funding for regional transportation programs that benefit us all.

Dan Silverthorn, the long-time Chair of the **Heart of Illinois Regional Port District** on the Illinois Waterway said, “We were happy to assist the Northern Grain Belt Ports in getting established and share the lessons we learned from creating the Illinois Waterway Ports, which went through the same process and was approved in 2021. We expect that the Northern Grain Belt Ports will see similar increased investment in their region, also.”

Mike Norris, Chair of **Mid-America Port Commission (MAPC)**, stated that, “the recognition of the Northern Grain Belt Ports will strengthen the case for additional transportation and natural infrastructure investment in the MAPC area. We are all part of the same inland ports and waterways system that is a critical component of the global supply chain.”

Rodney Knittel, the **Illinois Farm Bureau** Director of Transportation and Infrastructure and a board member of the **Upper Mississippi, Illinois, and Missouri Rivers Association**, said, “The creation of the Corn Belt Ports has been a very successful grass roots effort to bring attention to the value of waterborne commerce inside the Corn Belt’s lock and dam system. We are seeing the infrastructure investment benefits of this designation. The recent federal recognition of the Northern Grain Belt Ports will have a positive impact on the entire Upper Mississippi River and Illinois waterway System.”

Todd Main, Director of Market Development for the **Illinois Soybean Association**, remarked “The addition of the Northern Grain Belt Ports to the Corn Belt Ports family creates and bolsters an important national identity for America’s largest grain producing and exporting region. We welcome them to our larger team and appreciate their role in making our products more competitive in the global marketplace.”

Jim Tarmann, **Managing Director of the Illinois Corn Growers Association**, stated, “Our goal is to routinely handle well over 100 million tons of freight inside the Corn Belt’s Lock and Dam System. The recent federal recognition of the Northern Grain Belt Ports between Wisconsin and Minnesota will help us achieve that goal. The four regional Corn Belt Ports are important partners in marketing our agricultural commodities to global consumers.”

Bradley Schad, CEO for the **Missouri Corn Growers Association**, says “Having another Top 100 Principal U.S. Port [Northern Grain Belt Ports] on the Upper Mississippi River will only strengthen the case to accelerate the retrofitting of steamboat-era locks and dams with new,

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modern, and safer 1200' locks in Northeast Missouri. We welcome the Northern Grain Belt Ports as the newest member of the regional Corn Belt Ports.”

Emily Callison, Government Relations Manager for the **Iowa Corn Growers Association** stated, “We clearly see the benefit of having another nationally significant, regional port on the Upper Mississippi River. The Northern Grain Belt Ports is a natural partner of the Upper Mississippi Ports (Illinois and Iowa) and a crucial part of the global supply chain. We appreciate what the Northern Grain Belt Ports are doing to make our exports more attractive to markets all over the world.”

Mike Steenhoek, the Executive Director of the **Soy Transportation Coalition** stated, “The ports and terminals on the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway System are an essential part of the global supply chain. The further recognition of the inland ports within the Heart of the Corn Belt will help raise the importance of this region to the national and global economies.”

Roger Viadero, Director of **WIU’s [Western Illinois University’s] Institute for Environmental Studies** and Chair of Western’s Ph.D. Program in Environmental Science said, “Bringing the Corn Belt Ports online is an important step in balancing the multiple, competing needs for the limited water resources in the Upper Mississippi River Basin. This is an unprecedented opportunity to grow an integrated, multimodal transportation network while protecting and preserving natural resources on the Upper Mississippi River and the Illinois Waterway.”



The Northern Grain Belt Ports Region in Wisconsin and Minnesota