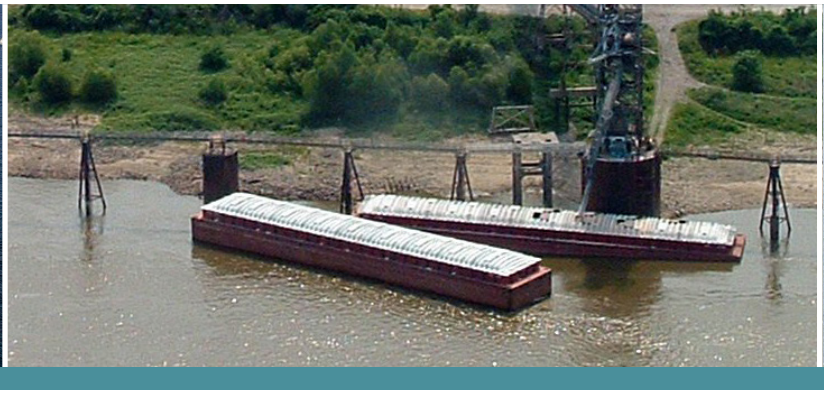
United States Department of Agriculture

Agricultural Marketing Service

June 2014

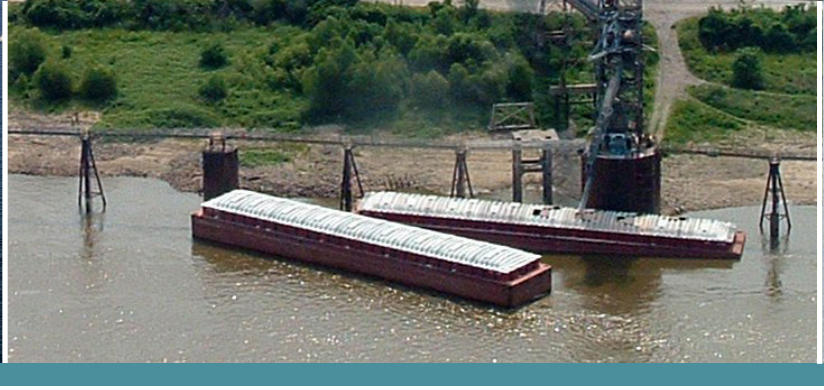
A Reliable Waterway System Is Important to Agriculture



Do You Know Why?

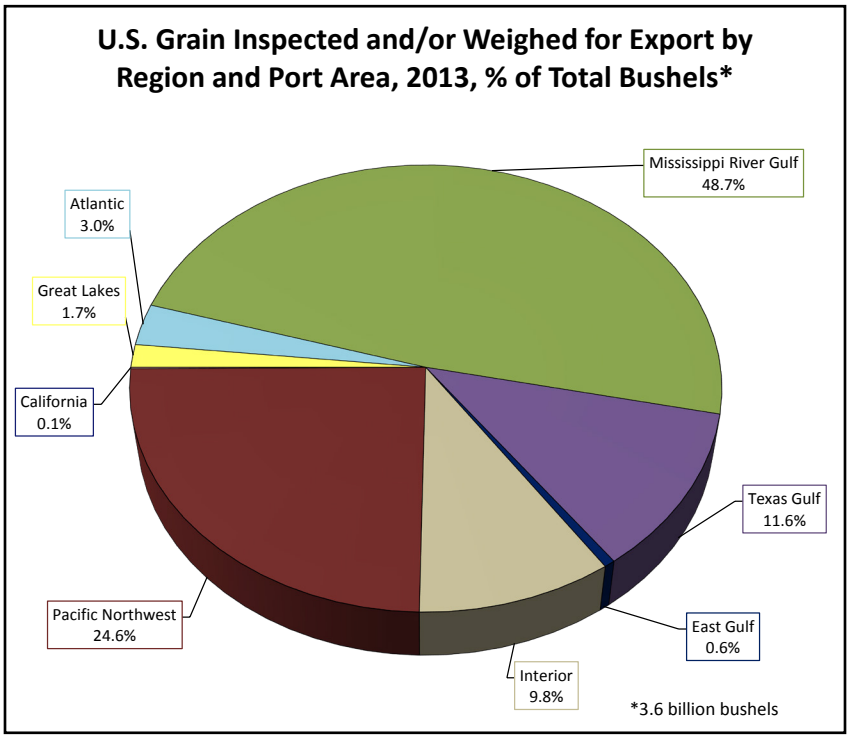
Big Picture Overview

- U.S. agriculture is expected to contribute $39 billion to the U.S. balance of trade in fiscal 2014. Exports are forecast to reach a record $149.5 billion, while imports are forecast to reach $110.5 billion. (*USDA ERS/FAS Outlook for U.S. Agricultural Trade,* May 29, 2014).
- Forestry and fishery products, and critical farm inputs such as fertilizer, feed, and fuel move on the waterway system as well.
- Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack noted that every $1 billion in farm exports supports roughly 8,400 jobs.
- In calendar year 2012, 81 percent of U.S. agricultural exports (138.8 million metric tons) and 72 percent of imports (39.9 million metric tons) were waterborne. (*Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, and PIERS*).
- Exporters, importers, and domestic shippers depend on authorized port and waterway depths and widths, and locks and dam infrastructure.
- The Harbor Maintenance Tax (HMT) is a 0.125 percent ad valorem tax on the value of imports and certain domestic waterborne cargo deposited in the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF).
- Estimated fiscal 2014 HMT revenues and investment interest are over $2 billion, while the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 provides $1 billion from the HMTF, yielding an estimated year-end balance of $8.87 billion. (*Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2014*).
- Commercial vessels engaged in waterborne transportation on the inland waterways system generate an estimated $95 million in revenues and investment interest from a 20 cents per gallon tax on diesel fuel, which is deposited in the Inland Waterways Trust Fund (IWTF) to finance one half the Federal costs of authorized locks and dams projects.
- The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 provides $163 million for the Olmsted Lock and Dam project, with only 25 percent of the Federal costs to come from the IWTF.

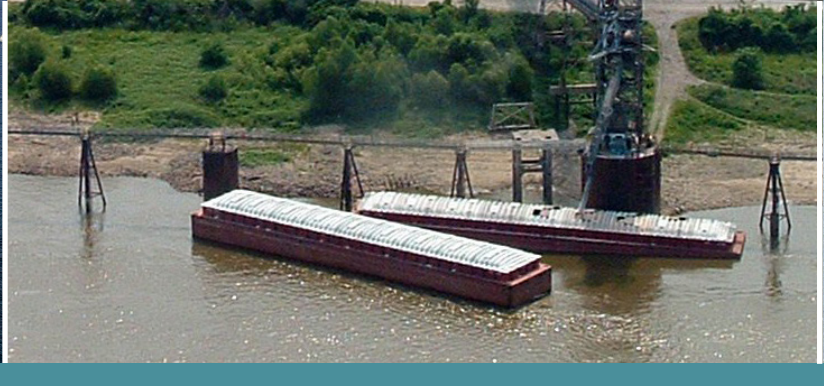


Grain Exports

- The United States exports approximately one quarter of the grain it produces. On average, this includes nearly 45 percent of the wheat, 35 percent of the soybeans, and 20 percent of the corn.
- Nearly 61 percent of grains inspected and/or weighed for export departed from Mississippi River, Texas, and East Gulf ports in calendar year 2013, over 2.2 billion bushels (*USDA GIPSA*).
- Pacific Northwest (PNW) ports accounted for 24.6 percent of grains inspected and/or weighed for export, over 891 million bushels.
- The May 9, 2014, *USDA World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates* projections for 2013/14 U.S. exports includes:
    - Corn—1.9 billion bushels (53.2 million short tons)
    - Soybeans—1.6 billion bushels (48 million short tons)
    - Wheat—1.185 billion bushels (35.55 million short tons)
    - Soybean meal—11.1 million short tons
    - Rice—95 million hundredweight (4.75 million short tons)
    - Sorghum—180 million bushels (5 million short tons)
    - Soybean oil—1.65 billion pounds (0.8 million short tons)

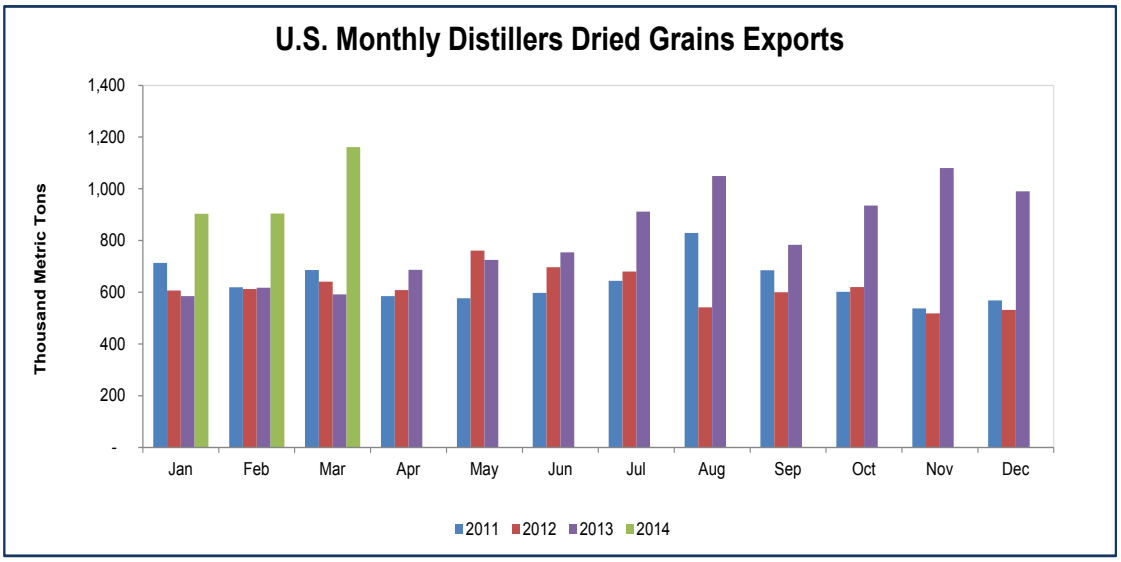


Source: USDA FGIS and USDA Market News, *Grain Inspected and/or Weighed for Export by Region and Port Area*, January 14, 2014



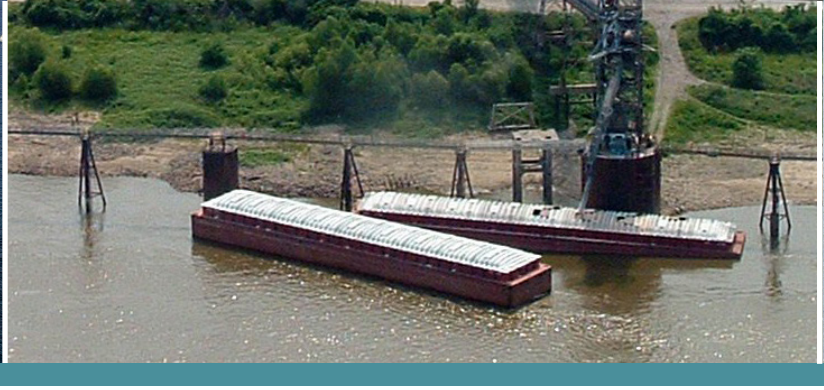
Ethanol, DDG, Corn Production, Fertilizer, and Barge Traffic

- U.S. ethanol production capacity at 188 operating refineries is over 14 billion gallons per year. (*Renewable Fuels Association, Biorefinery Locations, May 27, 2014).*
- Nearly 620 million gallons of ethanol were exported in calendar year 2013. (*Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce*).
- Major multimodal ethanol terminals include Albany, NY, Baltimore, MD, Chicago, IL, Houston, TX, Linden, Newark, New Orleans, LA, Sauget, IL, Sewaren, NJ, Providence, RI, and Tampa, FL.
- Barges move an estimated 5 percent of ethanol.
- Barges also move some of the fertilizer needed to grow corn for the production of ethanol, as well as some of the distillers dried grains (DDGS), an ethanol by-product used for animal feed.
- For every gallon of corn ethanol, about 6.34 pounds of DDGS are produced. Over 10.7 million short tons of DDGS were exported in calendary year 2013. (*Census Bureau*, *U.S. Department of Commerce*).



Source: Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce

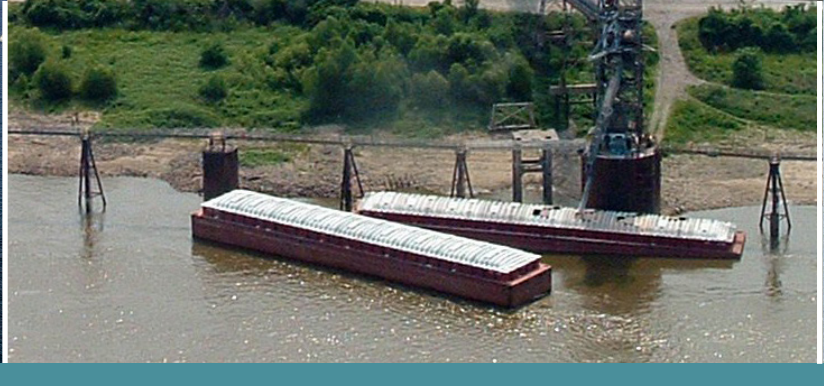
- USDA estimated a corn harvested area of 87.7 million acres in 2013/14, yielding 158.8 bushels per acre, with 5.05 billion bushels, or 34 percent of the total corn supply, to be converted to ethanol and by-products including DDGS. (May 9, 2014, *USDA World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates*).
- Corn uses about 240 pounds of fertilizer per planted acre, as it has high nitrogen requirements.
- The United States imported 42 million short tons of fertilizer in calendar year 2013. This included nearly 19.2 million short tons of nitrogen. (*Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce*).



Barge and Rail Competition

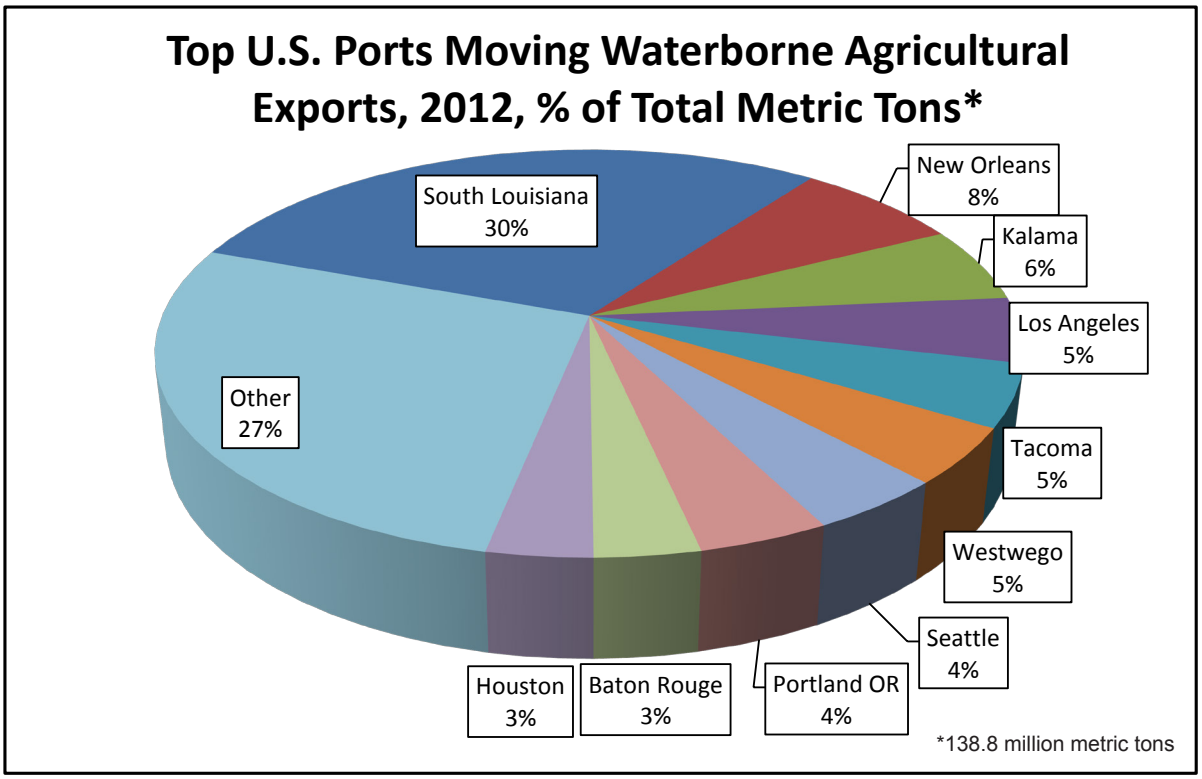
- In calendar year 2013, total food and farm product barge tonnage (upbound and downbound) at Mississippi Locks 27, Ohio Locks and Dam 52, and Arkansas Lock and Dam 1 was 32.2 million short tons (*U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Locks by Waterway, Tons Locked by Commodity Group, Calendar Years 1993-2013*).
- A substantial amount of export grain enters the Mississippi River below Mississippi River Locks 27, Ohio River Locks and Dam 52, and Arkansas Lock and Dam 1[1] (*U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and USDA GIPSA*).
- In 2013, 15,634 downbound grain barges passed through Locks 27, 52, and 1, with over 23.9 million short tons of grain.
- In comparison, 26,997 grain barges were unloaded in the New Orleans region during the period, a difference of 11,363 barges.
- Railroads originate approximately 29 percent of U.S. grain shipments and sent 297,036 carloads (an estimated 33 million short tons) to ports in 2013.
- Railroads take into account barge rates and the spread between U.S. Gulf and Pacific Northwest ocean vessel freight rates, and price their services accordingly.
- USDA *Transportation of U.S. Grains, A Modal Share Analysis, 1978-2011 Update*, shows that barges moved 43 percent and railroads moved 41 percent of all grain exports in 2011.
    - Barges moved 54 percent of corn to ports and 1 percent of corn to processors, feed lots, and dairies in 2011. Rail shares were 34 percent for exports and 20 percent for domestic moves.
    - Barges moved 49 percent of soybeans to ports and 2 percent of soybeans to processors in 2011. Rail shares were 31 percent for exports and 14 percent for domestic moves.
    - Barges moved 26 percent of wheat to ports and 2 percent of wheat to processors in 2011. Rail shares were 63 percent for exports and 63 percent for domestic moves.
    - Barges moved 11 percent of sorghum to ports in 2011. Rail shares were 21 percent for exports and 8 percent for domestic moves.
- Additional studies have shown that without barge competition, agricultural shippers pay higher rail transportation costs, the farther they are from an inland waterway.

1 Mississippi River Locks 27, also known as Chain of Rocks Locks, Granite City, IL, is the last lock for downbound barges on the Mississippi River. For purposes of measuring downbound tonnages on the Ohio River, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers collects data at Locks and Dam 52, Brookport, IL, because it is strategically located on the Ohio River near the junction of the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers. Locks and Dam 53, Grand Chain, IL, is technically the last lock on the Ohio River. Arkansas River Lock and Dam 1, also known as Norrell Lock, Tichnor, AR, is the last lock on the Arkansas River, but traffic must use the White River to connect with the Mississippi River. On the White River, Montgomery Point Lock and Dam, near Tichnor, AR, is used only during low water conditions.



Top U.S. Ports for Agricultural Exports

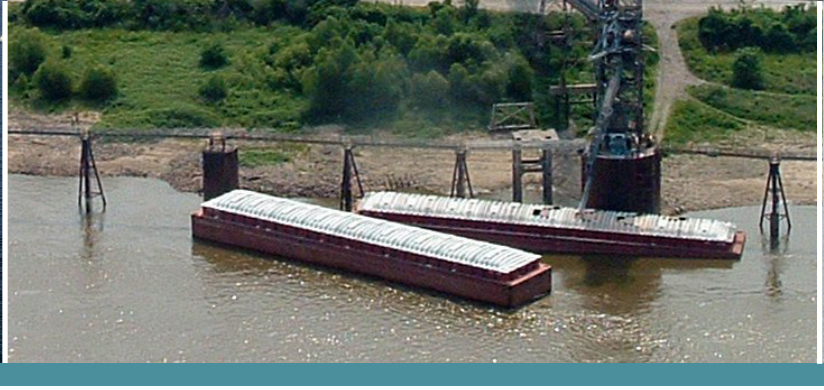
- In calendar year 2012, U.S. waterborne agricultural exports totaled 138.8 million metric tons, 25 percent were moved in containers (*PIERS).*
- During the same period, containers were used to transport 8 percent of total waterborne grain exports and 11 percent of U.S. grain exports to Asia.
- The top five U.S. ports for bulk and containerized agricultural exports were South Louisiana, New Orleans, Kalama, Seattle, and Los Angeles, and Tacoma. In terms of containerized movements, the top five ports were Los Angeles, Long Beach, Oakland, Seattle, and Tacoma.

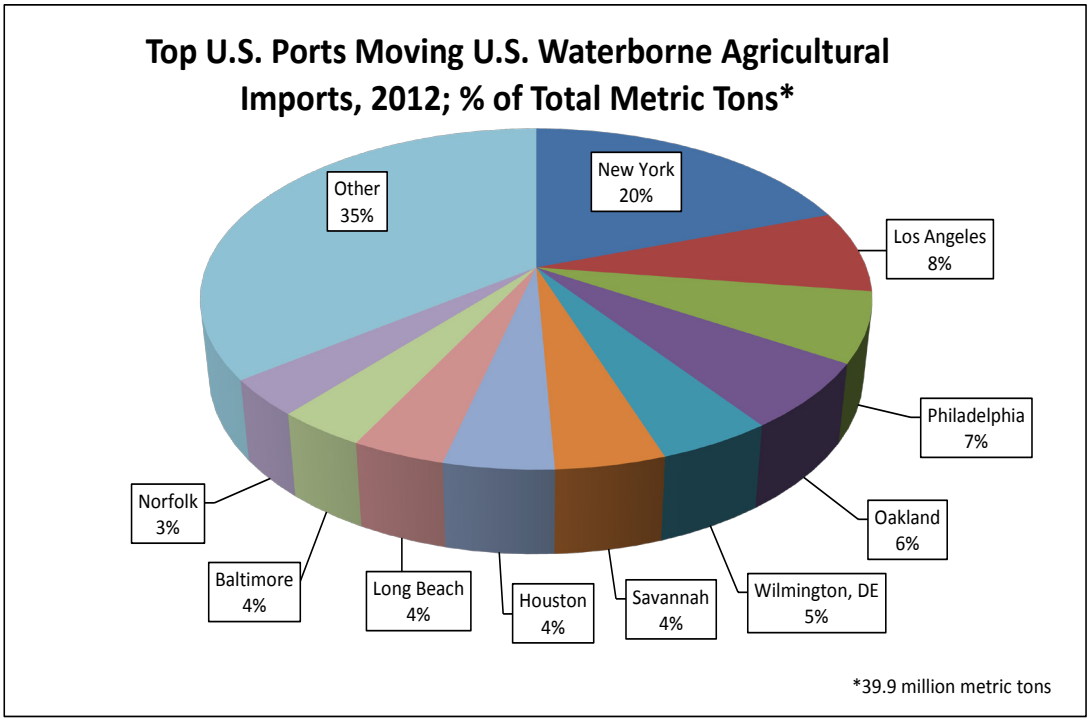


Source: (PIERS)

Top U.S. Ports for Agricultural Imports

- In calendar year 2012, U.S. bulk and containerized waterborne agricultural imports totaled 39.9 million metric tons, 73 percent were moved in containers (*PIERS*).
- The port of New York brought in more agricultural cargo than Los Angeles, Long Beach, and Oakland, CA combined—nearly 7.8 million metric tons.
- The top five U.S. ports for bulk and containerized agricultural imports were New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Oakland, and Wilmington, DE.

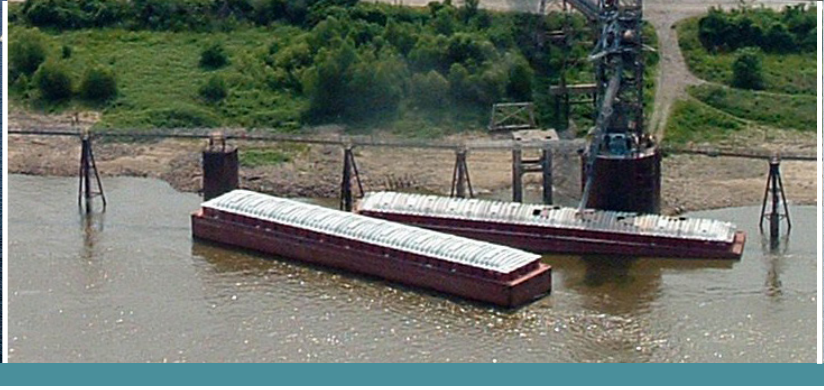




Source: (PIERS)

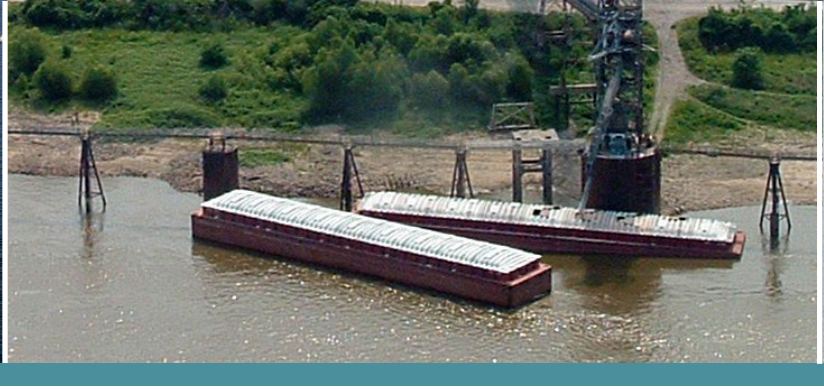
Harbor Channel and Inland Waterway Draft Issues

- Inadequate channel depths and widths due to drought and sedimentation can lead to higher transportation costs.
- Barges and vessels may be loaded to less than capacity because of low water.
- The number of barges in a tow may be reduced to the to the available channel width, and one-way, or day time only traffic restrictions may be imposed.
- In these cases more barges and vessels, and additional time may be required to ship a given amount of commodities.
- There have been extended periods where low river levels and reduced channel widths impeded grain barge movements and access to shallow draft ports.
- At a 9-foot draft, a barge has 1,500 short tons of capacity; for each foot of reduced draft, the barge loses about 200 short tons of capacity.
- When harbor channels are at less than authorized depths, S-Class container vessels lose 3,840 tons of cargo capacity per foot, Panamax bulk grain carriers lose 2,148 tons per foot, and Great Lakes ocean-bound vessels lose 1,389 tons per foot.
- Low water on the Great Lakes and unfunded dredging requirements has increased the risk of vessel groundings, reduced vessel carrying capacity by at least 10 percent, and increased shipping costs by $40 million a year. (*2012-13 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Water Basin Common Operating Picture*)



Effects of Temporary Closures on Costs, Receipts, and the Federal Budget

- U.S. exporters compete on the basis of world prices.
- Temporary closures and restrictions on traffic in harbors and channels due to flooding, drought, sedimentation, groundings, natural disasters, man-made disasters, strikes, and lockouts can lead to delays, spoilage, diversion to other modes and ports, higher transportation costs, and lost sales.
- Higher transportation costs can result in lower cash bids in interior markets. As cash prices fall, USDA loan deficiency payments may increase.
- U.S. exporters may be unable to pass on higher transportation costs, as customers can purchase similar products from other countries.
- In contrast, U.S. importers may be able to pass on higher transportation costs to their customers.
- Users of railroads and highways face congestion, constrained capacity, and driver and equipment shortages.
- Authorized channel depths and widths, and locks and dams maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers moderate the effects of congestion, provide resiliency, and enhance recovery after transportation disruptions.
- The Corps works to maintain operable navigation channels through accelerated dredging, rock removal, river training structures to remove sediment, strategic management of water releases from reservoirs, routinely scheduled surveys, and close collaboration with channel users and the U.S. Coast Guard on river conditions.
- Other important partners in a reliable waterway system include:
    - U.S. Coast Guard, which provides security, aids to navigation, and implements vessel traffic safety restrictions.
    - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration which provides nautical charts and maps, marine weather and river level information, surveys after disruptions, and marine debris removal.
    - Maritime Administration which promotes the development and maintenance of an adequate, well-balanced, United States merchant marine and marine highways.
    - Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation which promotes use of the Seaway and maintains and operates the two U.S. Seaway locks and vessel traffic control in areas of the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario, in collaboration with its Canadian partner, the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation.
    - Federal Maritime Commission which regulates oceanborne transportation in U.S. foreign commerce for the benefit of exporters, importers, and the American consumer.



Want to Know More? Try These Publications:

Studies and reports on modal share, competition, and infrastructure investment

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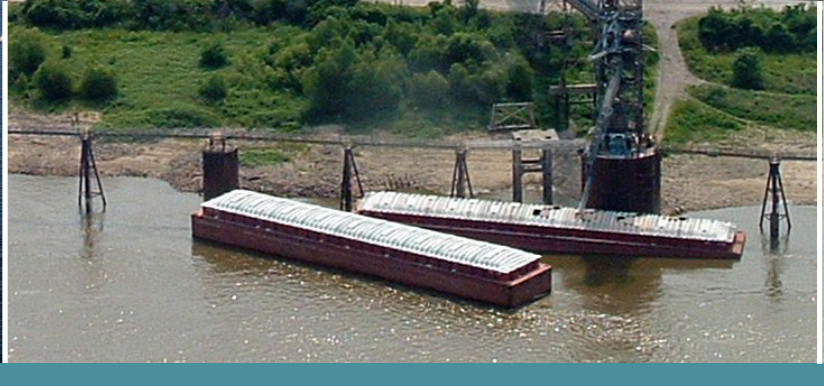

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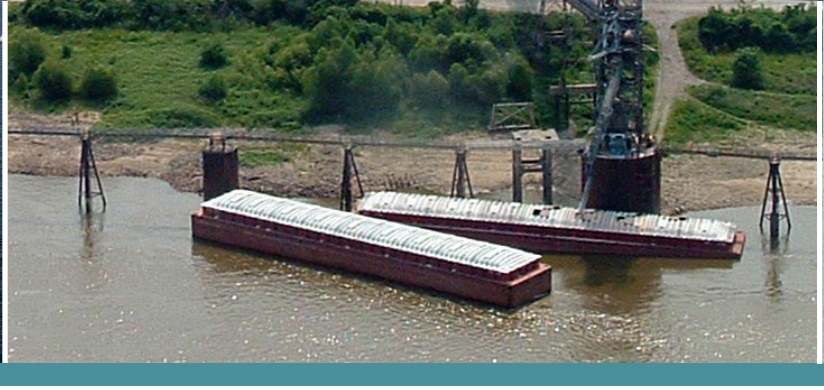

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