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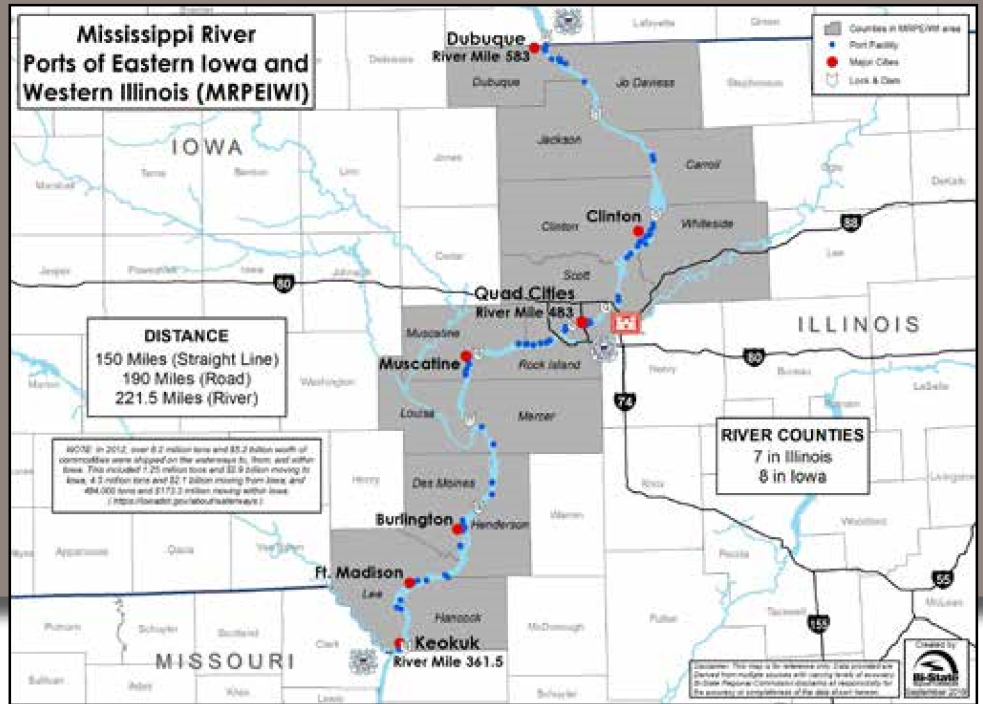
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Federal Recognition of the Ports of Eastern Iowa and Western Illinois is Long Overdue

— by Col. (Ret.) Robert Sinkler

Iowa is currently the only major exporting state on the inland waterway system (the mighty Mississippi River) which is not served by a federally recognized port. That does seem very peculiar, given Iowa is ranked overall second overall in the nation for value of agricultural exports. According to the Iowa Economic Development 2018 Trade Statistics, Iowa is first in the nation in corn exports (\$1.58 billion) and feed grain exports (\$1.22 billion); and is ranked second in soybean exports (\$3.05 billion). It especially seems striking for those of us who live along the river, as we witness the amount of barge traffic moving up and down the Mississippi. Waterborne commerce is undoubtedly and undeniably a very important part of our region's economy, and has been since before Iowa was a state. Just Google "U.S. Ports List," and Iowa is conspicuously absent as a state. Why doesn't Iowa have a port? It is simply because the counties along the Mississippi River have never asked the federal government to collectively recognize them and Iowa as having a port.

That situation is about to change. Regional planning agencies are finalizing the application for the creation of the Mississippi River Ports of Eastern Iowa and Western Illinois (MRPEIWI) Port Statistical Area (PSA) in consultation with government organizations in the region. Their effort is modeled after the Ports of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky PSA



A map of the proposed Mississippi River Ports of Eastern Iowa and Western Illinois (MRPEIWI)



"The Regional Planning Agencies are doing a wonderful service to the region by helping champion this effort for all."

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which was approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in January 2015. The initial MRPEIWI proposal (above) includes over 90 percent of Iowa's existing port infrastructure consisting of 50 existing barge terminals that are concentrated in 7-1/2 Iowa counties, and about 20 terminals across the river in Illinois. It is bi-state, 221-1/2 miles long, includes 15 counties, and spans all the way from Dubuque to Keokuk. MRPEIWI would rank 68th on the U.S. Ports list, based on the tonnage of imports and exports, and be the 20th largest inland port in the nation.

Why does the region need a port statistical area? It will enable the ports and points of origin and destination for the region's exports and imports to be accurately tied to a federally recognized port statistical area. It will enable our Corn Belt Port to be nationally ranked for it to be more visible, marketable, and economically competitive. It will enable more effective regional economic and multi-modal transportation system planning and development. Finally, MRPEIWI will be a vehicle that all in the region can use to help compete more effectively for outside investment. It is usually not considered part of the Midwestern DNA to ask the American taxpayer for assistance. Establishing MRPEIWI will not require congressional authorization or require a special federal appropriation. This region has always been the 20th largest inland port in the nation. Counties are just raising their hands and asking the U.S. government to recognize MRPEIWI. The regional planning agencies are doing a wonderful service to the region by helping champion this effort for all. ☺



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