

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Illinois Waterway and why is it important?

The Illinois Waterway (IWW) is comprised of the Illinois River and its feeder rivers, in addition to the lakes and streams, which connect the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico via the Mississippi River. The IWW system is a significant channel for freight movement and numerous other uses, serving local, regional, state and national economic interests.

The series of aging locks and dams that allow barges to move up and down the Waterway are not in good shape. Much of the initial construction was completed in the 1930s, meaning the system has far outlived its intended 50-year engineering, construction and design life span.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is responsible for maintaining the system, but its budget has not been funded at a level that keeps up with necessary maintenance and rehabilitation. The lack of annual federal funding cumulatively means the cumulative cost of deferred maintenance and repairs on the Illinois Waterway is now nearly \$600 million¹.

Furthermore, a number of locks are seen by some as inadequately sized to meet today's shipping needs. As a result, longer tows must be split and go through the locks in two separate moves. This can double or triple lockage time, raise transportation costs, increase safety concerns as well as add wear and tear on lock mechanisms and equipment.

How much freight is transported on the Waterway?

Each year more than **20 million tons** of commodities with a value of more than **\$10 billion** are transported via the Illinois Waterway alone. Corn and soybeans make up the largest percentage of goods that travel the Waterway, but traffic transporting cement and cement products follows closely behind.

A modern 15-barge tow carries the equivalent weight of 1,050 semi-trucks or 240 rail cars. This equates to an estimated **\$1 billion** in transportation cost savings annually.

Who benefits from the Waterway improvements?

A recent economic impact study conducted by the Economic Development Research Group on behalf of the Illinois Soybean Association checkoff program, the Illinois Corn Marketing Board, Illinois Farm Bureau, GROWMARK, the Illinois Chamber of Commerce Foundation and others found that new investments in the Waterway benefit a broad range of Illinois industries and workers, including:

- Manufacturing
- Agriculture
- Energy utilities
- Mining companies

The customers and supply chain business partners along with workers in these industries also benefit.

In addition, other businesses and workers particularly depend on the waterway for reasons beyond flood control and navigation uses. Those include water sources from the system for power plant cooling, municipal water systems, wildlife habitat preservation and recreational users.

Businesses in other states also gain, since commodity-shipping activity on the Illinois River also originates in, or is destined for, out-of-state locations, companies and beneficial uses.

(Include graphic from direct mail piece - # of jobs supported by the waterway)

Why can't we just fix one lock or dam at a time?

While it would be much less complicated to address a single lock and dam or two at a time, the whole system is interdependent—simply updating a lock along the system would increase bottlenecks and not

alleviate the equipment needs or size challenges. It would be the equivalent of replacing a single tire on a car with a broken axle.

It is clear that current Waterway operating and maintenance practices are not sufficient to guarantee a bright future for the reliable delivery of goods. The argument is strong—and getting stronger—for interested parties to join forces in collaborative efforts and drive innovative solutions to infrastructure challenges.

¹ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, March 2015.