

Upper Mississippi River Conservation Committee

The History of the Recreation and Water Use Technical Section 1963 to 2008

Born out of Necessity

Out of a growing need to address emerging resource management issues on the Upper Mississippi River, Dr. William C. Starrett of the Illinois Natural History Survey suggested the formation a new technical section. UMRCC executive board members recognized the utility of the recommendation and promptly supported the appointment of a technical section capable of dealing with resource management issues that included, but went beyond, the traditional fish and game technical issues. The new technical section was charged with investigating recreational issues, as defined in the broadest sense, and publicizing the UMRCC findings with an aim to preserve natural resources and protect public use of the river.

The Early Years

In 1963 Chairman Edward Schneberger of Wisconsin called the first meeting of the ad hoc Committee on Recreation and Water Use. The ad hoc Technical Section discussed 13 topics, ranging from land use planning to littering. The next year the ad hoc Technical Section was made a permanent UMRCC Technical Section. Over the course of the next five years, with C.W. Threinen of Wisconsin as Chairman, the Recreation and Water Use Technical Section focused on six to eight issues each year. Littering, houseboat mooring, land accretion, pleasure boat use, land use zoning, and lockage trends were some of the issues addressed in the early years.

Technical Section Wobbles but Doesn't Fall Down

By 1971, for reasons not stated in the proceedings, the Recreation and Water Use Technical Section was discussing fewer issues and expressing signs of frustration. Chairman Jerry Kuehn from Minnesota stated, "It is the Chairman's feeling that until the Section is given more positive assignment from the Committee (UMRCC Executive Board), the Recreation Water Use Section should remain inactive..." Fortunately UMRCC members were able to rally the troops. For the next 22 years the Section ran relatively smoothly with chairmanships shared by four of the five States.

Technical Section Wobbles and Falls Down

By 1993 it is clear from the proceedings that the Recreation and Water Use Technical Section, now called the Recreation Technical Section, was searching for direction. A survey of the members was used to identify topics of interest, the anticipated level of participation and preferred meeting structure and frequency. It is possible that because of the inability of the Technical Section to get recreation monitoring included as part of the Long-Term Resource Monitoring Program or to gain funding for the recreational component of EMP (later eliminated in new legislative language), the Technical Section lost its vigor and momentum. Chairman Allan Robbins-Fenger valiantly tried to keep the Section moving ahead by expanding the number of issues in discussion. In 1994, the Technical Section sponsored the Upper Mississippi River, Education and Networking Conference that featured 14 invited speakers and a large audience. Participants were

enthusiastic about the Conference's outcome but there wasn't enough fire in the belly remaining to organize another conference. One can only surmise that the members were overwhelmed with the need to better manage human use on the river and frustrated with the lack of resources, institutional commitment and political will to adequately address them.

Despite the best efforts of the Technical Section members in the early 1990s, there was not enough interest in the Upper Mississippi River States to sustain it. By 1995, under Bill Donnels of Illinois Chairmanship, an agenda, but no meeting notes were printed in the proceedings. In that fateful year, the agenda included a discussion of the goals and functions of the Technical Section and a plea for a volunteer to be Chairman. It is unknown if the meeting actually took place or which members may have participated. The Technical Section struggled with Interim/Acting Chairmanships for the next four years with no minutes published in the proceedings. From 2000 to 2005, there were no designated Chairmen, no agendas and no meeting notes printed in the proceedings. During this time, the Navigation Expansion Feasibility Study was completing the recreational boating impact studies. These studies had been identified for many years as essential for better management of Mississippi River recreation. At the time of its publication, the Technical Section did not review Environmental Appendix J. Boat Traffic Report of the Upper Mississippi River – Illinois Waterway System Navigation Feasibility Study.

Picking up the Pieces

In 2005, Kevin Berg of the Corps and Scot Johnson of Minnesota thought it would be worth the effort to try and revive the Recreation Technical Section. An informal Technical Section meeting was held during the 2006 Annual Meeting. A wide-ranging discussion ensued. It was determined that there was enough interest to warrant the scheduling of a fall technical meeting. Unfortunately, the fall meeting had to be cancelled due to scheduling conflicts and travel constraints for a number of the members. Undaunted, the Recreation Technical Section organized a technical meeting during the 2007 Annual Meeting which was very successful. Later that fall, the Recreation Technical Section met jointly with the Fish Technical and Wildlife Technical Sections. It is anticipated that the Recreation Technical Section will meet during the 2008 UMRCC Annual Meeting in Collinsville, Illinois, to set its direction and identify its focus for the coming years.

Table 1. Partial List of Topics over the Years

1. Mapping
2. Land Use Planning/Zoning
3. Sewage/Pollution/Water Quality
4. Anti-Litter Campaign
5. River Bottom Dumps
6. Houseboat Mooring and Sanitation
7. Siltation/Sedimentation/9-Foot Channel Operations and Maintenance
8. Spoil Disposal/Survey
9. River Access and Public Use Areas
10. Cottages on Corps Land
11. Squatting on Public Land
12. Navigational Aids in Backwaters
13. State Law Reciprocity/Uniformity
14. Boat Speed in Confined Waters
15. Pleasure Boat Use
16. Accreted Land
17. Boat Surveys
18. Education
19. Floodplain Zoning
20. Boat Mooring
21. Sandbar Recreation/Beaches/Beach Plans
22. Closed Areas near Dams
23. Maintenance of Backwaters
24. Boating Trends
25. 12-Foot Channel
26. Facilities Summation/Recreation Inventory/River Resource Inventory
27. National Recreation Area
28. Recreational Legislation and Funding
29. Boating Safety/Signs
30. Recreational Use Study
31. Non-game Species
32. GREAT I, II, III
33. State Boating Laws Uniformity
34. Locking Times
35. Recreational Development Constraints/Recreation Facilities Needs
36. LTRMP and Recreation
37. Refuge Master Plan
38. Corps Recreation Master Plan
39. UMRBA Master Plan
40. Recreational Economics
41. Field Trips
42. Barge Fleeting
43. Recreation and EMP
44. Canoe Trails
45. Organized Events Coordination
46. Pool Maps
47. Handicap Accessibility
48. Marinas
49. Physical Impacts of Recreational Boating
50. Land Use Allocation Mapping
51. Navigation Reconnaissance Study
52. Avoid and Minimize for Recreational Boating
53. Aerial Boat Surveys
54. Recreational Boater Fees
55. Recreational Use Ethics/Leave No Trace
56. Great River Road
57. Strategic Planning and Long-Range Vision
58. Mel Price Visitors Center
59. Comprehensive Conservation Plan
60. Cultural Resources Awareness
61. Recreation Web Page
62. Asian Carp
63. Geocaching
64. Wake Board Boats
65. RAMSAR
66. Global Climate Change
67. Flash Flooding
68. NESP
69. Recreation Technical Section History

