NOAA Hydrographic Services Review Panel Meeting

Col. Miles Keynote Speech

Oct. 12, 2010

Dr. Robinson … Mr. Kennedy … Mr. Welch … Capt. Lowell … other Distinguished Guests, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for that warm welcome, it is a real pleasure to be here this morning and be a part of this panel meeting.

I would like to thank the members of the review panel and Jon Dasler for the invitation to participate as the Commander of the Portland District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and as a Partner, as a Stakeholder, and as a Contributor to this important Hydrographic Survey mission we all do for the people of this Nation.

I’d also like to add my welcome to the participants of this meeting who traveled from outside the Northwest; it surely is a beautiful part of the country, blessed with powerful rivers, tall mountains, and a majestic coastline.

The sister cities of Vancouver and Portland are vibrant and growing, with parks, open air restaurants, and some of the best micro breweries in the world. I am sure you’ll enjoy your stay here along the Columbia River and all that this region has to offer.

As an Army Engineer Officer, survey, mapping and charting is in our professional DNA dating back to the continental Army days led by George Washington, the Lewis and Clark Expedition days, and the days of the civil war. Early on, Army Engineer Officers were known for their topography and survey skills to best orienteer and navigate over the terrain and in the waters.

For me personally, this mapping and charting endeavor is near and dear to my heart and I have a personal interest and passion in this field. Most recently before commanding the Portland District, I served as a Geospatial Engineer Battalion Commander in Hawaii where I commanded one of only 2 Topographic Engineer Battalions in the Army. We were a theater level asset that produced specialized maps for U.S. ground forces in the Pacific region, and worked closely with the National Geospatial and Imaginary Agency (NGA). We also had a deep sea dive company and in addition to their underwater clearance and construction mission, they executed hydrographic survey and side-scan sonar missions. One of their really unique missions, was their numerous and routine deployments to southeast Asia, places like … Vietnam…., Laos…., Cambodia….. as part of the Joint Forces Full Accounting Command with specialized Remains Recovery Teams.

Their hydrographic and side-scan sonar equipment allowed them to detect and locate downed aircraft along the littoral waters and ultimately recover the remains of many fallen service members.

This is one example of why I feel hydrographic engineering and hydrographic survey are so important, because while surface land mapping technology has rapidly advanced, ((- - - doesn’t almost everyone now have “Google Earth” on their blackberry or iphone?----- pulling down amazing maps and imagery at our finger tips - - ))) BUT, seeing the floor of the ocean and rivers is much more difficult and is always a changing environment.

When I think of “Hydrographic Survey” – the concept of “six degrees of separation” comes to mind….it’s also known as the human web, referring to the idea that everyone is at most six steps away from any other person with some common nexus or common connection. As I glanced at the attendee list for this meeting, hydrographic survey may be our common thread that aligns us this morning, but there are also many other connections to these complex relationships; for example; the conditions of the jetties that we maintain is another connection to Captain Dan Jordan and his bar pilots that are here today; the NOAA mapping and charting products that our Dredge Captains use everyday to safely navigate the oceans around the world; Emergency Spill Response coordination we do with CAPT Doug Kuap (Cop) and his USCG team that is here today, our Columbia River deepening project and the impacts to Captain Paul Amos (A’mes) and his River Pilots……. The connections go on and on….the web builds into a complex network.

To me this demonstrates our interdependence, and how complex the world has grown, and meetings like this are so crucial to understanding our relationships, building-on our synergy, reducing duplication, enhancing technical and policy collaboration, and finding ways to better share data.

I’d like to give a brief overview of the Portland District and how we use hydrographic survey equipment and products for a broad spectrum of missions, it is an essential and crucial tool for us in understanding river flows, river capacity, hydraulic conditions, sediment transport, and dredging requirements, - it’s data can be used as a leading indicator to better see and understand mission requirements and risks.

Our District was formed in 1871 on the premise of navigation and managing the Water Resources of this region. Today, (with nearly 1,300 professionals in the District) we are the largest Hydropower producer in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, nearly one quarter of all that is generated by the Corps, enough to light up 6 Seattles, a city like Seattle consumes about 1,000MWs.

We operate and maintain the lower 1/2 of the nearly 400 mile Columbia-Snake navigation – lock system ----- a $18B transportation system that goes from Lewiston, Idaho to the Pacific Ocean , #1 export in the U.S. for Wheat, Barley and other grains from as far as North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas, that transport their agriculture products to the head waters of the snake river navigation system in Idaho to leverage this great inland navigation system. These exports travel across the bar at the Mouth of the Columbia River, the gateway to places like Japan, Korea, China, and Indonesia.

Our 3rd top tier mission is Flood Damage Reduction and our series of 18 dams work together as a sub-system within a larger regional system. They also rely on hydrographic survey data and NOAA’s daily weather forecasts and severe storm warnings to best manage the reservoir release flows to protect the people of this region from devastating flash floods that happened all too often at the turn of the last century.

Our Districts are aligned by watersheds, Portland District includes southwest Washington ( about 40-50 miles into Washington State from the Columbia River) and most of Oregon. This allows us to leverage basin solutions and apply watershed and system tools to manage the water resources in close coordination with other federal and state agencies, local governments and NGOs.

Improving and maintaining navigation for economic development and safety is where the Corps and NOAA find a lot of common ground …… For the Corps, this means building and maintaining jetties along the Oregon coast … it means dredging to ensure the federal navigation channel in the Columbia River remains accessible and navigable to maritime vessels … it means conducting hydrographic surveys along the length of the navigation channel and sharing that information with NOAA and other federal partners and stakeholders.

We recently welcomed two new survey boats into the Districts’ fleet, to help us with our navigation mission. The *Redlinger* and the *Elton* are members of a new modern, generation of survey boats … designed to be the most stable and reliable vessels possible. They are a 60 foot hydrofoil-assisted catamaran design, aluminum hull, with twin 850 hp jet propulsion engines built in the USA.

Expectations are high that *Redlinger* and *Elton* will set a new standard of excellence in collecting Hydrographic survey data.

The *Redlinger* and *Elton* will be very helpful in another project the Corps is undertaking … surveying the Columbia River from Vancouver to The Dalles … the first time the river has been surveyed since the 1990s. During FY11 we will survey the river from Bonneville to The Dalles, updating navigation data for the entire area. Recently the towboaters association has expressed concern that the navigation channel in this area is less than the 17-foot required depth. Tributaries flowing into the Columbia River can deposit a lot of sediment, based on rain and flow patterns. Right now this is only a survey project … we are investigating the need for future action. If our efforts show there is a need for remedial action, we will secure environmental clearances and seek funding in the President’s budget and take action.

We all know that the only way things really get done these days is through collaboration and partnerships … and we in the Corps value the relationship we have with NOAA and the other teammates here today.

We maintain the federal navigation channel … NOAA oversees the shore-to-shore footprint. We are both dedicated to public safety and supporting maritime commerce.

Sometimes a lack of standardized terms can cause challenges. For example, last year the Tidewater barge *New Dawn* ran aground near Hood River, Oregon. There was lots of confusion on where the vessel was, in or out of the federally authorized channel; was it in or out of the shipping channel, and to many of the public who watched the news coverage that evening – they were left asking why is there a difference. Well there is a difference, a big difference. The shipping channel can be a larger area then the federally authorized channel that is marked with “buoys” or other “aids to navigation” by the USCG. The media saw the conflict amongst the stakeholders and played with it pretty hard. Bottomline, we learned that we must speak with one voice, a common language, and standardized terms in order to build confidence that the situation is under control. Our mandate from Congress means we can maintain only the federal navigation channel … there may be areas outside the defined navigation channel that are deep enough for ships to pass that is called a shipping channel, but we, the Corps, are limited to the federally authorized boundaries. By the way, this area is included in our survey of the river I spoke about earlier to best evaluate the conditions and develop a path forward to address these depth and shoaling concerns.

The Corps can only work on projects authorized and funded by the U.S. Congress. Until Congress changes an authorization or adds to it, we are not able to spend our budget on a new mission. However, I want to be clear … we are committed to working with our partners in maintaining the federal navigation channel. We can make adjustments to alignment of the federal channel, within certain limitations … in concert with our federal partners.

If a larger adjustment were needed, we could do a feasibility study to determine whether changing the federal navigation channel would be fiscally and environmentally viable … if our study finds it is a feasible alternative, we can request funding and authorization from Congress. As a process it is not a quick fix, but it can offer a permanent change when conditions warrant.

Now getting back to a comment that I made earlier, sharing data and areas where we can really roll up our sleeves and make a difference. This sharing of data sounds easy, but as we all know, these issues are more complex. Many of the agencies here today, Federal, State and Contractor, collect survey data in different ways, with different equipment, under different authorities, for different purposes, and of course in different formats and accuracies. I feel this is one of the greatest challenges in the field of hydrographic survey and geospatial engineering.

A smarter, more efficient Federal Government, connected and sharing like a enterprise system is what our President has challenged us to deliver. We need to focus on enhancing our inter-dependence, building synergy in our joint activities to leverage our crucial resources to best serve the public.

We value our partnerships and strive to maintain them. In fact, similar to me being with you this morning, Chris Libeau [Luh-BOW] from the NOAA Charting Division is speaking to the Corps’ National hydrographic survey Community of Practice Meeting this afternoon … just across the river in Portland. Our meeting planners tried to find time for your group and ours to get together for a meet-and-greet, but both our schedules were too jam-packed to squeeze anything in. I’d like to suggest that perhaps next year we can schedule our meetings in the same city again … and include some joint sessions and break-out meetings where we can come together and tackle some of the challenges we are both facing.

I believe partnerships are vital to our future success … perhaps long ago federal agencies were able to work in a bubble, but that day is long past … and I believe we are better stewards of the nation’s resources when we work together with our stakeholders.

Together NOAA and the Corps spend millions of dollars maintaining the Columbia River federal navigation channel … why is our work important? In short, it is because last year more than 18 billion dollars’ worth of commerce passed through the Columbia River system. Without our efforts, Idaho would be land-locked, unable to ship products worth more than 800 million dollars … Montana would be unable to ship more than 70 million tons of wheat down the Columbia River… and more than 85 percent of Oregon’s wheat travels down the river. According to the State of Washington’s Marine Cargo Forecast, total volume of waterborne trade is expected to increase from the current level of 75 million tons to 125 million tons over the next 20 years … and that, ladies and gentlemen, is why our work is important.

It’s not just about the citizens and companies located on the banks of the Columbia River that benefit from our efforts … the river’s economic impact is felt across the nation.

Dr. Robinson … Mr. Kennedy … Mr. Welch … Captain Lowell … thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. The Portland District has been part of the community since 1871 … we have completed jetties … and repaired those jetties … deepened the Columbia River to 43 feet … looked under the water to map the riverbed’s dimensions … and tried to provide a safe and healthy habitat for nature’s creatures living in and around the river.

NOAA and the Corps are partners in supporting the nation. We couldn’t do our job without each other … and we will continue to collaborate and innovate to explore areas where we can make enhancements to best share data and concepts.

I’d like to close with one more reason why our work is important … in addition to our navigation efforts, both NOAA and the Corps work to safeguard the nation’s environmental assets … and the Columbia River Gorge is one of the most beautiful stretches of river in the world. We want to … we *need* to … keep it healthy and beautiful so boaters, recreaters and tourists can enjoy the natural beauty of the Pacific Northwest … even as commerce continues to safely move up from the Mouth of the Columbia to the communities that rely on our best efforts.

Thank you for your attention, and best to you all for a great session this week. Building Strong – Army STRONG