

Testimony by Michael R. Lorino, Jr.
Before the Senate Committee on
Environment and Public Works
Tuesday, October 18, 2011

Thank you Madam Chairman and committee members.

Madam Chairman, before I touch on some of my concerns with the 2011 high water situation on the Mississippi River system, I would like to thank the Corps New Orleans District for doing a great job not only this year but in past years as well. When they have been adequately funded and equipped, they are fantastic.

Madam Chairman, this brings me to our primary issue - how can we adequately fund the Corps' budget to properly maintain the Mississippi River System? I can assure this committee, it is well within all of our best interests to collaborate and solve this problem.

Combined, the 5 ports on the Mississippi River make up the largest port system in the U.S. and the 2nd largest in the world. More than 10,300 vessels transited through Southwest Pass going either in or out of our river system in 2010.

Each of those vessels was safely navigated through one of the most treacherous and demanding river systems in the world.

Failure to properly maintain Southwest Pass to project dimensions is a safety issue for all of us who live and work on the river, but just as importantly it is a substantial economic threat to the nation.

We handle 25% to 30% of the nation's oil and 60% to 70% of the nation's grain exports. Those numbers can be reduced drastically without proper maintenance of the shipping channel.

The issue is complex, but the bottom line is simple - without adequate funding for dredging and maintenance, you cannot get American-made and grown goods on ships for export when high river conditions exist. The demand for these products exists, but if shipping companies cannot access American goods, they will go elsewhere. I don't have to tell you what that would mean for our farmers, millions of individual jobs, and our nation's economic bottom line.

The problems we see today comes from two sources - consistent under-funding of the Corps and the misuse of the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, which was instituted to ensure necessary funding for our ports and harbors.

For the past 12 years, the New Orleans district has been underfunded in their O&M budget. Next year, they will be underfunded by at least \$20 million, and that is if nothing goes wrong, such as a higher river than expected, for example.

To their credit, for the past 13 years the Mississippi Valley Division of the Corps has understood how critical the Mississippi River system is, and they have reprogrammed funds from other project budgets to accommodate necessary dredging.

Reprogramming of funding will no longer occur. The Corps now operates under a White Paper that restricts funding usage, and this new policy eliminates the possibility of dredging enough to maintain project dimensions at any particular time.

In one of the many meetings I have had with the Corps on this issue, I discussed the economic impact associated with lost cargo, and the response was “it will be shipped from other ports in the U.S.”. This, for the record, is inaccurate. When I further stated we could have groundings, or even worse an oil spill - I was told that “maybe something has to bring this to a boil”.

This brings me to serious concern that the change in Corps policy regarding funding does not reflect sufficient priority to the Mississippi River system. Instead, it appears to be more about political posturing in an effort to game further, albeit necessary, funding for the Corps. We are being used as a pawn in a very, very dangerous game.

Madam Chairman and members, this is not an acceptable way to manage the busiest and most complex waterway system in the U.S. and possibly the world.

Please refer to the slide presentation that we have provided. I would like to review the diagrams that demonstrate the impacts of loss of project dimensions, depth and width increases, and the possibility of a collision in Southwest Pass, which would shut off America’s heartland.



*Associated Branch Pilots for the
Port of New Orleans*

Capt. Mike Lorino, President

Southwest Pass Area

Examples of the Known Effects to Navigation
Due to Channel Narrowing

Existing Channel Widths Entrance to the Mississippi River Southwest Pass Area



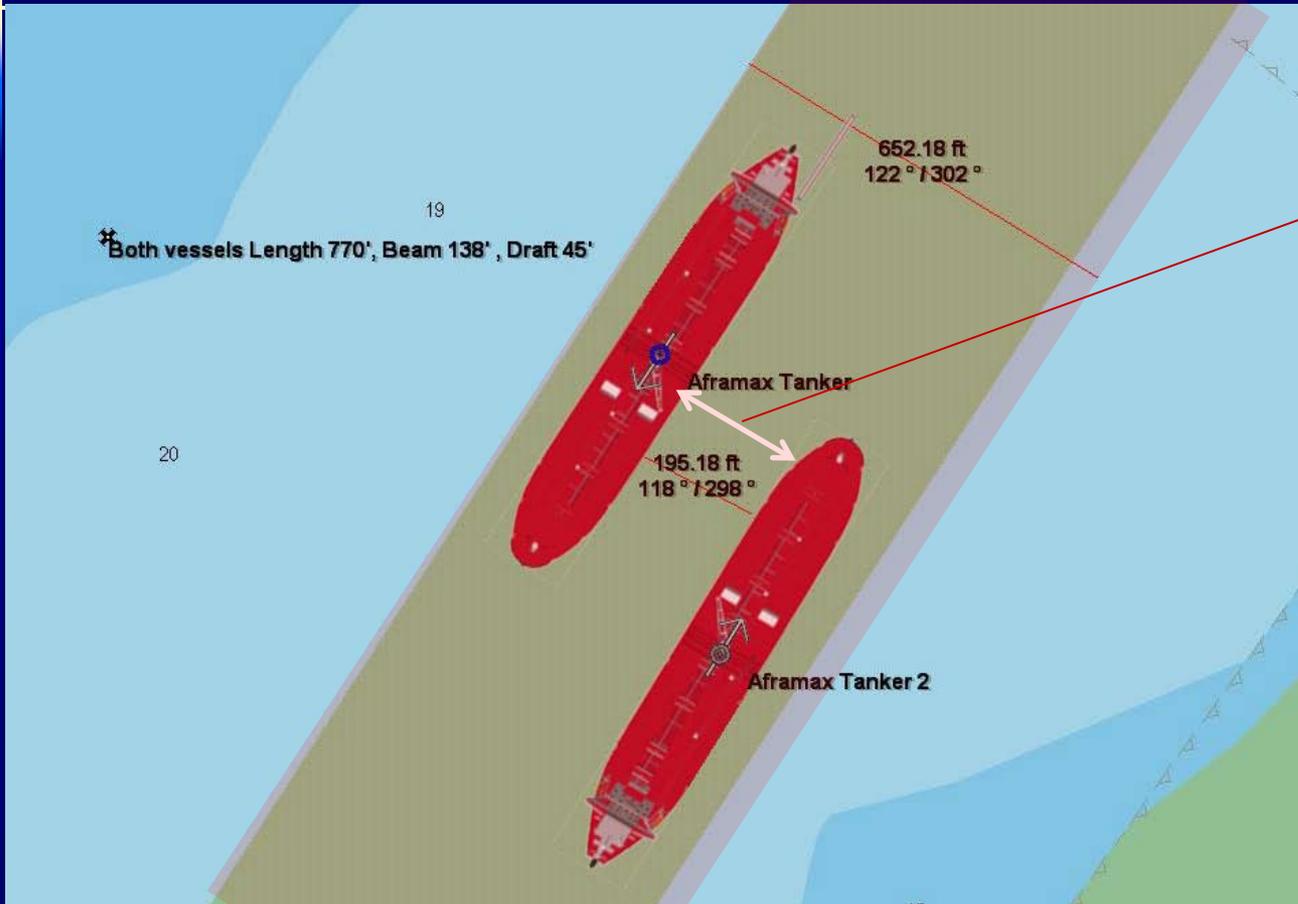
Safe Passing Distance in Existing 650' Channel



Photo: Mississippi River Trade and Transport Council

Existing Safe Passing Separation Approximately 300'

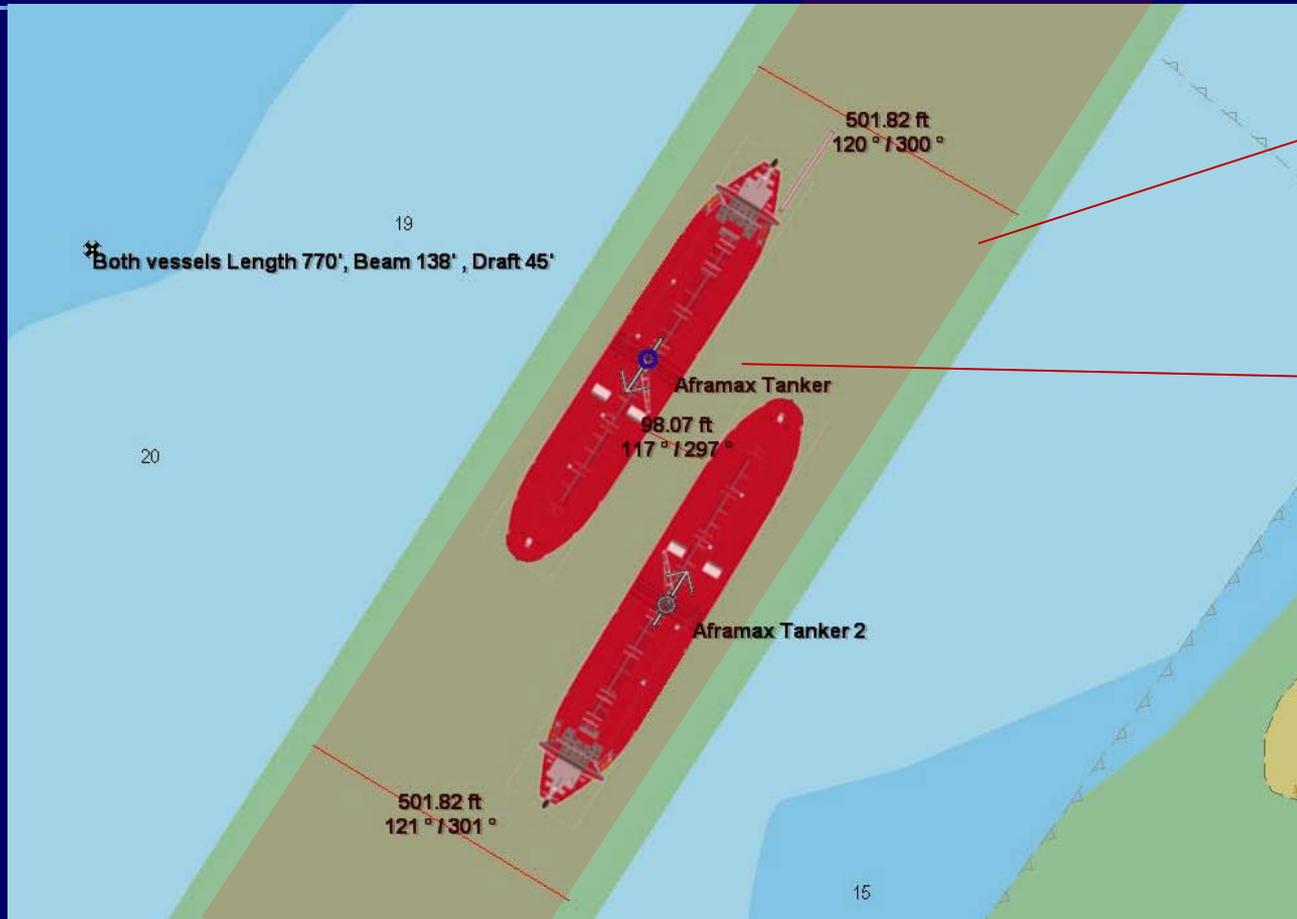
Effect of Narrowing From 750' to a 650' Channel



Passing
clearance
reduced
from 300'
to **195'**



600' Channel Narrowed to 500'

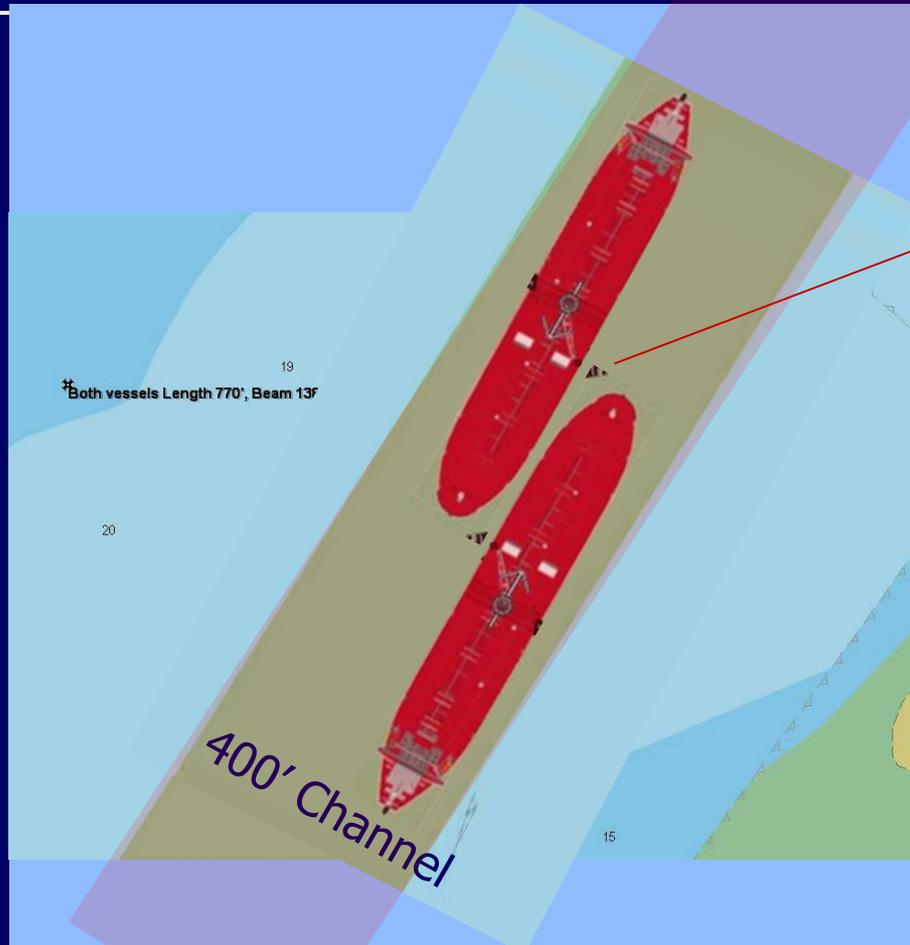


500' Channel Narrowing

100' Clearance Remaining



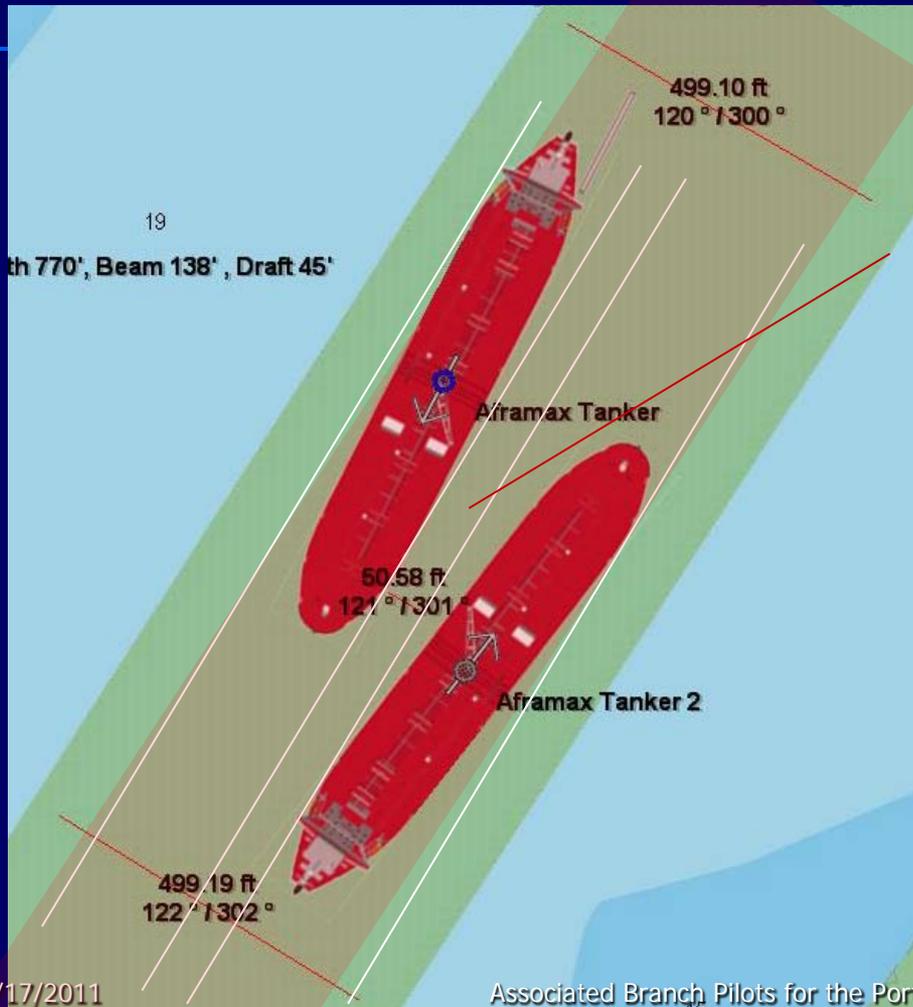
Narrowing to 400' Channel



400' channel

No safe passing
distance
remaining

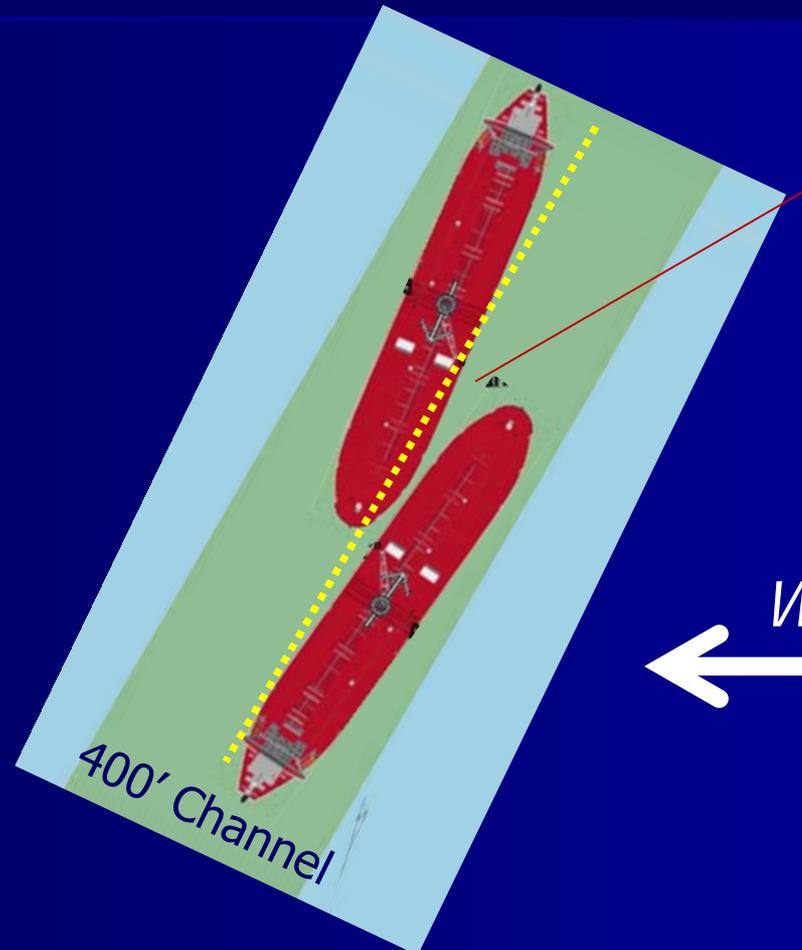
10 Degrees of Vessel Leeway in a Narrowed 500' Channel



50' remaining passing distance

Wind: East @ 15kn

10 Degrees of Leeway in a 400' Channel



Potential Collision

← Wind: East @ 15kn

Crash Stop



- In high current conditions, it often takes nearly 4 miles to stop a loaded down-bound ship in the Mississippi River entrance passes.
- Many ships will end up stranded aground after this maneuver.

Crash Stop



Loaded Tanker

~ 4 Miles to Stop in High River



Crash Stop Ends Here

4 miles to sea

Mississippi River
Southwest Pass Exit Channel

Crash Stop Starts Here

10/17/20



Associated Branch Pilots for the Port of New Orleans

Capt. Mike Lorino, President

Thank You

Examples of the Known Effects to Navigation
Due to Channel Narrowing