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The Civil Works Challenge. Water Resources Infrastructure

The Army Corps of Engineers undertakes transformation to meet 21st century water-resource demands.



Written by: **Jan Tegler** on June 2, 2013

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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Nashville District work crews from the Cumberland River Operations Center unwater Barkley Lock on the Cumberland River, near Kuttawa, Ky., to perform scheduled inspection and major maintenance repairs Aug. 12, 2011. The navigation lock is located on the left bank of the main dam structure and was opened to navigation in July 1964. it is 800 feet long and 110 feet wide. the gravity fill-and-empty system exchanges 37,500,000 gallons of water per lockage. The lock is operated 24 hours per day. U.S. Army Corps of





Making decisions concerning critical infrastructure often comes down to identifying which assets are most at risk, Stockton said.

“That’s how we set priorities as with our dam safety major modification program. We’ve gone in and had a very rigorous approach to looking at projects and prioritizing them. We call it Dam Safety Action Classification. We’ve assigned them different categories based on the risks that they pose. The risk is really two components. One is the probability of failure of the project or its individual components, but also the consequences if it were to fail.

“For instance, if you had a levee fail and you flooded agricultural land, that would be relatively low risk even though there was a high probability of failing. If it did fail, the consequences would be pretty minimal. We have a rigorous approach to setting priorities for dams and levees. We’ve done the same thing for the inland navigation system and our hydropower plants.”

Finally, USACE recognizes that there likely will not be enough federal dollars for USACE to meet all of its Civil Works responsibilities. According to Stockton, the organization is examining public-private partnerships, leases, and divestiture of projects. Other options include removing unnecessary administrative or regulatory obstacles and streamlining procedures for non-federal parties to move forward on their own with important water resources activities, while ensuring federal interests are maintained. Available technical



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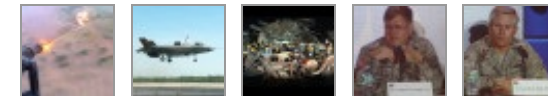
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assistance programs will be utilized to further enable non-federal partners to solve complex project and system challenges.

“Really, we’re looking at ways to perhaps utilize other people’s money to accomplish our mission. That’s politically charged and complicated but necessary.”

Enhancing Product and Service Delivery Methods

The final pillar of transformation acknowledges another shortcoming in USACE’s performance. The organization must improve the manner in which it delivers water resources infrastructure. USACE must produce better consistency in the design of its products, enhance technical competence, and improve its ability to meet or exceed customer expectations.



The Dredge Brunswick performs maintenance dredging in the Savannah Harbor, Savannah, Ga. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Savannah District oversees maintenance of the harbor. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers photo by Billy Birdwell

“We’re focused on ensuring we have the most efficient, cost-effective, and timely delivery of projects, programs, and activities. We’re focused on how we improve quality, how we link technical capability to desired levels of service, retain expertise and core competencies, reduce risk, and ensure consistency throughout this large decentralized organization.”

Stockton said the organization has closely examined how it delivers products and services. For instance, engineering design and construction is currently done at the district level. The transformation plan looks to encourage a sharing of capabilities to deliver products and services at the regional level. The objective is that service

delivery methods are consolidated and viewed with an enterprise-wide perspective nationally.

“What are the things we need to be world class at and have more of an enterprise approach to?” Stockton asked. “For our 702 dams, we’ve examined Dam Safety Production Centers. This is a complicated, critical, very expensive business, and we can’t have every one of the 38 CONUS [continental United States] districts be managing these if they’re only doing it once every 25 years. You just can’t maintain the skills and expertise you need. So we’re going to have seven of these centers – one in each of the seven CONUS divisions – to do dam safety major modifications.

“In the area of inland navigation design, we’re going to have two centers handling that for the nation, since most of those are within the Lakes and Rivers Division and the Mississippi Valley Division. The third area is deep-draft navigation economics. It’s a very specialized area. Not many other people do it and to get consistency we’re only going to do that in one place. The reason is it’s pretty easy when you’re doing bulk cargo because it typically goes from point A to point B. But when you’re dealing with containerized cargo it’s much more complicated. What depth of channel do you need? It really depends on what they’re dropping off and what they’re picking up.”

Cultural Change

With the process of transformation little more than a year old, Stockton knows USACE has a long way to go to implement the changes the plan requires. USACE’s senior leadership has “bought in” to transformation. The next phase is to get the word out to USACE Civil Works personnel and to continue refining the plan.

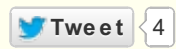
“We’re doing a lot of that with our planning pilots, changing our budget guidance, and we’ve actually implemented some of these methods of delivery,” Stockton said. “The infrastructure strategy is probably the most immature at this point. A lot of this just amounts to doing a lot of missionary work, meeting with all of the different divisions and districts and creating some incentives for these entities to participate in the transformation initiative.”

“This is more of a campaign than an individual battle. The cultural changes are probably the most difficult to complete. Getting people to take some risks and do things differently is going to be tough. Some things won’t be favorable to some of the people impacted. I think we’re resolved to creating forcing functions so that people are incentivized to comply. The planning piece is a good example. People must be 3-by-3-by-3 compliant or they have to seek a waiver and they don’t get money unless they show us what they’re going to do and how. We have to get everyone involved in the Civil Works challenge.”

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