

LTG Flowers  
Suggested Remarks  
Conference of Mayors  
21 January 2004

It is an honor for me to be here and to speak for a few minutes about the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and our role in assisting our nation's cities.

The Corps is proud to help develop local and state-led water resources solutions, so that America's cities, the vibrant centers of culture and commerce, can provide and protect high quality water resources.

America's mayors and local governments do more than care for cities; they help create communities. And we know that for communities to thrive, water resources must meet the needs of growing populations so that economic, environmental and social health will prosper.

It's a lesson the Corps has learned from serving the nation for more than two hundred years.

Our experience in developing and managing water resources began in the early 1800's, first to facilitate Army cargo movements, and then to assist economic development.

Today, the Corps of Engineers remains responsible for a wide range of military and civil works missions that provides great value to the nation. The experience our employees gain from working on civil works projects allows us to quickly respond to our nation's wartime needs.

Most recently, Corps employees were working on water resources projects here in the U.S., and just days later were in Afghanistan and Iraq, supporting our military commanders with engineering and technical expertise.

Through the years, our missions have evolved to meet the needs of a changing nation. Today, the Chief of Engineers is granted more than 200 authorities. There is one in particular I'd like to highlight, because it has served as a convenient tool for cities with smaller projects.

The Continuing Authorities Program allows the Corps to undertake nine types of water resource and ecosystem restoration projects without specific congressional authorization.

Cedar Falls, Iowa used the program to construct a levee and increase flood protection. And in Louisville, Kentucky, improvements are being made to the natural environment of Beargrass Creek, a tributary to the Ohio River. The project will create wetlands and a wildlife sanctuary for birds and other animals.

We are pleased that the program has allowed projects to move more quickly so that the benefits are more quickly realized.

I've pointed out just one authority. The fact is, the Corps' unique experience and contracting mechanisms have made us the agency of choice and a convenient one-stop shop for many customers. We are proud of what we have to offer, but there may be new ways for us to work together.

For example, we might look at ways to share water resources data and analysis, technical assistance or other information. Working in new ways may require new authorities, but the first step is to see how we might find those new ways to meet the scope and complexity of our water resources challenges.

But that doesn't mean we are always the right choice.

You may have seen the Christmas classic, *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street*. In the film, the Macys Santa Claus told customers where to find gifts that Macys didn't carry. Well, that is how I think of the Corps. If we aren't the right ones to help you, we will tell you.

Although there is much the Corps can offer, the fact is, during these hard-pressed times, no single government agency or organization can deal with large-scale issues alone. Decreasing budgets and increasing missions affect us all. The nation continues to fight the global war on terrorism, and to secure the homeland.

Increasingly, the Corps is developing partnerships to solve some of our nation's greatest challenges. We are proud to work with the Environmental Protection Agency to help revitalize our nation's Brownfields. We've also joined a new multi-agency initiative to restore our nation's Portfields. Together, our two agencies and cities will return those once prized areas back into valued lands.

The Corps is also enormously proud of its role as a founding member of the Infrastructure Security Partnership, a forum to improve the security of our nation's built infrastructure. Some of the nation's best engineering and construction minds are at work on this tremendously important effort.

Collaborative efforts, such as TISP, are also the way to deal with the scope and complexity of water resources issues. And that leads me to another point: the Corps' direction.

We have come to realize the importance of solving water challenges through a watershed perspective; comprehensively and in a collaborative manner.

The importance of using a watershed approach was reinforced to us during three years of listening sessions around the country, where we heard from numerous citizens and leaders.

In the past, when our nation was sparsely populated, single projects worked. In 1904, the United States population was about 82 million. Today, it is over 292 million. Not only is our population growing, it is growing fastest where there is already competition for available water supplies. Today, solving a problem in one location often creates problems for another area.

As a result, we taking a watershed approach with numerous projects. The Corps is one of numerous agencies working together to create long range, large-scale ecosystem restoration strategies to restore the Everglades and Louisiana's shrinking coastal wetlands.

Also, we requested funding in our 2004 fiscal year budget to monitor five relatively small watersheds as pilot projects. One of these is the Anacostia Watershed here in Washington D.C., which is also a pilot project in E-P-A's Urban Rivers Initiative. About 25 agencies and groups are involved in working on the watershed's future. And that is the way to go. True collaboration is the only way to work from a watershed perspective, and the only way to find those win-win solutions we need to meet the needs of our communities.

To assist us in our new direction, we are restructuring the Corps. Our divisions and districts are already organized along watersheds. But now, we are tearing away stovepipes and the sequential layers of review that cause project delays.

Our new structure, comprised of cross-functional teams, will save time on reviews without compromising the thoroughness of studies.

The change will also allow each division to leverage the talent within each region, instead of by district only, so that the right resources and expertise are allocated to each project. These changes will result in faster and better service for you.

Although our reorganization will go a long way toward improving our effectiveness and efficiency, there is something else that will improve our ability to help you.

I know there have been instances when projects took a long time to move through the permitting process. My request is for your staff to include us very early in the planning phase of projects.

If you include us early on, our professionals can let you know about the problems up front. And they may have suggestions that would turn a 'no' to a 'yes' – without delaying the project and its benefits.

So call us early, call us often. And if your staff believes they are not getting the help they need, feel free to call the district leadership. Or, contact the regional business center. And if that doesn't work, let me know.

Let me close by saying, that the men and women who make up the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are part of the communities they serve. They too want to see their neighborhoods and cities thrive.

We are proud to have a role in increasing the quality of life for the cities throughout this great nation. It is not only a mission, it is a privilege. And we look forward to working with you. Thank you.