

Columbia-Snake River barge system

By Robert L. Wallack, AJOT

Oregon's Port of Portland, hub of the Columbia-Snake river container barging system, strengthens the Pacific Northwest's trade with Asia and the world.

The neighboring states of Washington, Idaho and Montana, with agricultural businesses located 150 miles or more from points along the 465-mile river system, make use of the barging service. Moreover, other multimodal services of railroads and highways, along with the Port's Terminal 6 container terminal and its adjacent industrial properties in Portland, enable manufacturers to distribute containerized cargo throughout North America.

In the 1930s, more than 100 years after Lewis and Clark first traversed the Columbia and Snake rivers, President Franklin Roosevelt began harnessing the navigation potential of the river system with the Bonneville Dam project. Now, there are eight hydroelectric dams with navigational locks: four on the lower Snake and four on the Columbia, with water falling more than 1,000 feet to the ocean. In fact, the descent of the Columbia River's water is the steepest drop of any major North American river, accounting for its tremendous hydro-generating power.

"After Bonneville,

seven more dams and locks were built in the river system. The locks in these dams were specifically designed for the compact, efficient Pacific Northwest tug and barge trades," said Aaron Ellis, maritime public affairs manager for the Port of Portland. "The seven dams built after Bonneville, the last of which was completed in 1975, all have navigation locks able to accommodate doublewide barge tows of up to 84 feet wide and 650 feet long.

In the early 1990s, Congress appropriated the necessary funds to replace Bonneville's narrow navigation lock with one that can handle the same doublewide tows as the other seven river system locks.

"After that, tug and barge combinations no longer had to be split apart just to get through the Columbia's oldest navigation lock, which greatly added to the speed and efficiency of the barging trade," adds Ellis.

The container barge transportation system on the Columbia-Snake River began in 1975, shortly after the Port of Portland opened its Terminal 6 container facility. Today, with three competing tug and barge lines, some 50,000 containers are moved off and on barges annually, contributing substantially to the \$14 billion in com-

merce through the lower Columbia River.

There are 36 ports in the navigable portion of the Columbia-Snake River system. Four of them—at Boardman and Umatilla, OR; Pasco, WA; and Lewiston, Idaho—are barge ports that handle dry and refrigerated containers. The only deep-water container port in this system, however, is the Port of Portland, located 105 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean on the Columbia River's minimum 40-foot deep navigation channel.

TWO-DAY MAXIMUM TRANSIT TIME

The Port's Terminal 6 is the barging connection, or hub, for both ocean-going ships and for river barges. The four upriver shallow draft container ports have a minimum 14-foot deep navigation channel. In addition to containers, they also handle grain, petroleum, forest products and other cargoes.

"The Port of Portland's Terminal 6 is the container-on-barge system's fulcrum," said Ellis. "Containers are moved in river barges from the shallow-draft ports to Terminal 6, where they are transloaded to ocean going ships."

Barging containers on most of America's inland waterways is generally (SNAKE RIVER- continued on page 2A)

WTO praises Canada for its trade liberalization

The World Trade Organization gave Canada high marks recently for its generally liberal line on trade, but pointed to some areas, such as agriculture and steel, that were still protected by import barriers.

"...its trade regime is amongst the world's most transparent and liberal, notwithstanding barriers to imports in a few albeit important sectors," the Geneva-based WTO said in a review of Ottawa's trade policies.

The report, the first on Canada since December 2000, said Ottawa's "sound economic policies" and its "outward-looking" trade policies had helped sustain the country's economic

growth despite the global economic slowdown.

Growth was 4 percent over the first half of 2002, although it appeared to have slowed somewhat over the second six months, it noted.

The WTO listed agriculture, textiles and clothing, steel, telecommunications, audiovisual, air and maritime transport and insurance as areas still subject to significant support, although change was under way in several of them.

"Carrying on additional reforms would help reduce remaining barriers to trade and investment and improve resource allo-

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DHL announces expansion of US and Canada global service parts network

DHL Worldwide Express announced the kick-off of its global service parts logistics capability in the US and Canada with the opening of a key Express Logistics Center (ELC) in San Francisco, California.

"The opening of the San Francisco ELC marks the beginning of expansion plans for DHL's logistics offering in the US and Canada," noted DHL's Vice President Global Logistics, Charles Menkhorst. "DHL is the

market leader in the provision of mission-critical service parts logistics solutions in regions around the world. Our comprehensive roll-out into North America will secure a global offering for our customers."

In addition to the new San Francisco facility, DHL operates US-based ELCs in Cincinnati and Miami. DHL's ELCs operate in regions around the world including Brus-

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(SNAKE RIVER - continued from page 1A)

not an efficient option for most shippers, owing to the time sensitivity of the cargo. However, the compactness and speed of most Columbia-Snake river barge tows, the efficiency of the system's navigation locks, the coordination between the ports and transportation service providers and the economical nature of the travel mode has persuaded hundreds of Pacific Northwest container shippers to switch from truck or rail to barge to get their products to and from a seaport hub such as Portland.

In fact, the lower Columbia River is the largest wheat handling system in the country, carrying about 37% of all US wheat exports. The barge system also handles forest product exports for markets in countries like Japan, Korea and Taiwan, while major upbound commodities include petroleum, fertilizers and equipment, such as large gas- and wind-powered energy turbines.

Domestic cargoes carried by river barges include wood chips, sand, gravel and equipment.

The Columbia Snake's 465 miles is unlike longer rivers of the Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio, which handle more cargo volume, but do not handle containers as efficiently. The time element on the Columbia-Snake is reduced so that the longest container barge trip from eastern-most Lewiston to the deep water at the Port of Portland is 51 hours, or about two days.

"The shipping industry tells us that two days is an acceptable time frame for transporting most export goods from Lewiston to Portland for loading onto deep draft ships for export, especially considering the significant dollar cost savings of river barging versus land transportation," said Ellis.

The three companies that provide regularly scheduled container-barge service are Bernert Barge Lines, Foss Maritime, and Tidewater Barge Lines for reefer and dry container barges. "The three competing tug and barge companies that handle containers on the Columbia-Snake system provide a multiplicity of services and schedules so shippers are not reliant on just one company or

one day out of the week to ship their products," stated Ellis.

LOWER INLAND TRANSPORTATION COSTS

An essential service provided by the barge companies is the timely transmittal of data in the form of electronic data interchange (EDI), detailing what cargoes are in the containers being carried by the barges.

"The cargo information and shipping manifests arrive at the Port of Portland prior to delivery of the containers. The system allows vessel stowage planners time to determine where the containers will be placed on the ship and gives a heads up for US Customs to determine what they may want to inspect before containers are offloaded from the barges," said Ellis.

Exporters can significantly lower their inland transportation costs by using the container barge system. Port of Portland finds that shippers moving cargo by barge in the tri-state region (Oregon, Washington and Idaho) to Portland can save 25% or more compared to truck and rail mode transport rates. The savings can top \$200 per container and use considerably less fuel (thus fewer polluting emissions) to reach deep-water common carriers calling at the Port of Portland.

Container barges are lashed together with other types of barges, such as those that carry grain, fuel, liquid and dry fertilizers, forest products and a range of other commodities. Generally, a tug on the Columbia-Snake will push four to five barges lashed together, but tows of up to seven barges have been accomplished successfully by one tug on the river, stated Ellis.

J.R. Simplot, an Idaho agribusiness company, exports reefer containers full of frozen French fry potatoes, chilled meat and beef by the Columbia-Snake container barge system. The World Food Program exports wheat to famine-stricken areas such as Afghanistan through the river system.

Western Alfalfa, Inc., of Irrigon, OR exports 95% of its \$9 million annual harvest specifically for dairy lots in Japan. Sue Edson, Western Alfalfa's finance manager, explains, "The company has a good relation-

ship with the river system's service providers and speaks daily on issues with the Port of Portland."

Potlatch Corporation, a \$1.75 billion diversified wood and paper products company, exports milk carton stock by containers via the river system to Japan and Korea, according to the Port of Portland. Furthermore, imported lumber from Australia, New Zealand, Chile and Brazil moves in container barges along the Columbia-Snake to mills in eastern Oregon and Idaho.

Improved service is underway along the river system and at the Port of Portland. Currently, a pair of navigation miter gates that have cracks in them at the Lower Granite Dam near Lewiston are being repaired, affecting about 40% of the river traffic until the end of April. Truckers must load the cargo in the Lewiston area and move it around the dam to rejoin the river system at the Port of Pasco. Ellis noted, "The challenge is being overcome through small sacrifices and terrific cooperation by everyone connected with river transportation, such as the ports, barge companies, truckers, shippers and other stakeholders on the system."

To help ensure the viability of the river system, in August 1999 the US Congress authorized the Columbia River Channel Improvement Project to deepen the lower river from the Pacific to Portland

from 40 feet deep to 43 feet.

The purpose of the project is to accommodate the larger, deeper draft ships now being deployed worldwide.

Although still authorized by Congress, the project hit a snag in August 2000 when federal fisheries agencies withdrew their favorable Biological Opinion.

Shortly thereafter, they entered into reconsultation with the US Army Corps of Engineers better to determine environmental risks of the project in relation to the Endangered Species Act.

With reconsultation now complete, the Corps and the six lower Columbia River sponsor ports (Portland & St. Helens, in Oregon; and Vancouver, Woodland, Kalama and Longview, in Washington) are awaiting state and federal agency approvals before channel deepening can begin, according to Ellis.

Some 15 ocean carriers are represented on containerships that call the Port of Portland. Among them are "K" Line, Hyundai, Italia Line and Fesco, which combined move over \$10 billion in worldwide trade a year over Portland's docks. Containerized cargo of agriculture products via the Columbia-Snake river system, manufactured items such as Nike shoes and Dollar Tree Stores' consumer goods for rail and truck distribution, as well as automobiles, are all readily handled by the Port of Portland facilities and services.

Restaurateurs bid 'Adieu' to French wines, liquors and Pour into Chattahoochee River, Killer Creek

Putting patriotism ahead of profits, the owners of three Atlanta-area restaurants poured a selection of French wines and liquors into local waterways recently.

"As of March 17, Ray's on the River Seafood House, Killer Creek and Siesta Grill have stopped serving French wines and liquors," said Raymond Schoenbaum, one of the owners of the Killer Restaurants group. "We are proud to support America. The government of France continues to thwart our efforts to keep peace in the world. We will

not support France until they support America. Doing the right thing is more important than money."

Customers accustomed to wine with their meal won't have to do without. "There are many great wines from other parts of the world at affordable prices," said John Ellis, another of the owners. "Our customers may discover wines they enjoy even better."

Killer Restaurants is the parent company of Ray's on the River Seafood House, Killer Creek and Siesta Grill.