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## Dave Koehler

SENATOR • 46<sup>th</sup> SENATE DISTRICT  
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The Illinois Waterway Ports Commission was just an idea in 2019. By 2023 every Democrat and Republican in the state legislature voted for the Illinois Waterway Ports Commission Act. And, I was honored to be the sponsor in the Senate for this important legislation.

The Illinois Waterway Ports Commission is a good example of how communities, economic interests, and environmental organizations can regionally come together to build a better, more sustainable Illinois River for the future.

Since 2019, the Illinois River and its riverfront communities have received over a billion dollars in multi-modal transportation, natural, and other infrastructure investment, to include things like rural broadband. Much of the investment was from federal programs we have never received funding from before, like: the first U.S. Maritime Administration Port Infrastructure Development Program grant, which was the largest in Illinois State History (\$38 Million to Hennepin, IL); the first National Science Foundation grant for advancing Smart Logistics; the first U.S. EPA Clean Ports Program Grant, and the first ever large scale ecosystem restoration project under the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program. The Illinois River received hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in our federal navigation infrastructure. Much of this increased investment was possible because of the strong support from and partnership with U.S. Senators Durbin and Duckworth and our Illinois Congressional Delegation, and partnership with the organizations that have been here over the last 3 days. We have had people here from Canada to Louisiana, and from California to Washington, DC. That just reinforces how important the Illinois River is to the national and global supply chains, and reinforces the national and global significance of the Illinois River as an important aquatic ecosystem.

As described by Dr. Chris Merritt from the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs housed at Western Illinois University, the Illinois Waterway Ports Commission serves as the foundation for a rural regional economic development engine that benefits Central and North Central Illinois. We are thrilled to see the Illinois Waterway Ports Commission model now being adopted in Southern Illinois and elsewhere to benefit Illinois. We do want a regional port system in Illinois that serves all of Illinois from the large metropolitan areas to the smallest riverfront communities.

The Illinois Waterway Ports Commission is a regional partnership between five ports, and organizations like the newly formed Illinois River Cities and Towns Initiative, the Illinois River Carriers Association, the Greater Peoria Economic Development Council, Tri-County Regional Planning Commission, the Green Marine Highway Initiative, and a strong sustainability and environmental working group which includes the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and organizations like the Nature Conservancy and Ducks Unlimited. The Illinois Waterway Ports Commission is a unifier and not a divider that brings people and organizations together to make a difference and have a positive collective impact.



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The Illinois River saw a 20% increase in corn being shipped through the Illinois Waterway Ports Commission area in 2025. That is an unprecedented annual increase. Modern, sustainable, rural, regional, multi-modal ports in Illinois are essential to our state's economy and enable our farmers to safely, reliably and dependably get their products to global markets. The Illinois Waterway Ports Commission is important to organizations like the Illinois Soybean Association, the Illinois Corn Growers, and the Illinois Farm Bureau which have all spoken at the 3-Day Corn Belt Ports Partnership Summit.

The new Green Marine Highway Initiative which is sponsored and supported by the Illinois Waterway Ports Commission will ensure that Central and North Central Illinois does lead the nation in important clean energy and decarbonization initiatives that all have intersections with our river's infrastructure. From biofuels and renewables, to hydropower, to hydrogen production facilities, to wind power, to moving more freight from roads to waterways, and even advancing carbon storing wetlands enables the Heart of Corn Belt to shape our nation's future.

In 2022, Illinois was the eighth largest waterborne commerce state in the nation, and we expect that it will climb to be the 7<sup>th</sup> largest waterborne commerce state, and the top inland port state in the nation over the next few years. According to the National Waterways Foundation, Illinois Inland Ports and Waterways and associate industries supported nearly 262,000 jobs, \$17.7 billion in personal income, and \$28.2 billion in Gross State Product. This resulted in \$2.0 billion in state & local tax revenue. Over a third of that is tied to the Illinois Waterway Ports Commission, and the Illinois River and Waterway.

We want and need a strong river system in Illinois that not only includes the Illinois River, but also includes the Upper Mississippi River, the Middle Mississippi River, the Ohio River, the Kaskaskia River, and others. The Illinois Waterway Ports Commission has an important responsibility to protect the integrity of the supply chain and ensure that the Illinois River has an environmentally sustainable future. And, at the same time partnering with other ports and river organizations in the state of Illinois to achieve common objectives and ensure everyone is successful.

I was with you at your first Illinois Waterway Ports Commission and am happy to be here today to participate in and celebrate your successes, and support the future of the Illinois River.