

More than \$42 million designated for lock and dam repairs

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By Adam Fabian, Times Staff

(Washington, DC) - The Emsworth Locks and Dam, called unreliable and a risk for failure by engineers, are set to receive more than \$42 million for repairs.

The funds were approved Wednesday by the U.S. Senate and House as part of the 2008 Consolidated Appropriations Bill and will now go before President Bush for approval.

Rep. Jason Altmire, D-4, McCandless Township, who co-sponsored the funding with Rep. Mike Doyle, D-14, Forest Hills, said it is important and necessary to keep interstate commerce along the Ohio River alive.

Altmire said he saw the need for repairs when he toured the locks and dam in February and April. Without rehabilitation, he said the 85-year-old Emsworth facility - the oldest on the Ohio River system - is susceptible to failure.

In recent years, the operators have had to shut down the facility because of various problems, forcing river traffic to use a smaller auxiliary chamber that large barges cannot use.

Along with the \$42.31 million for repairs to the Emsworth Locks and Dam, Altmire said an additional \$2.5 million was approved for a navigation study for the Emsworth, Dashiels and Montgomery dams.

The study will look at ways to repair the aging dams, a key to keeping barges moving along the river, Altmire said.

"It really makes a huge difference to have those in working order," he said.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers spokeswoman Karen Auer said the money, once approved, will fund the replacement of main channel dam gates, dam scour protection and dam service bridges.

She said the funding included in the bill will allow her agency to award contracts to start the repair projects.

With sufficient funding, the total project is expected to be completed in 2014 at an estimated cost of \$163.8 million, Auer said. The agency previously received \$35.5 million toward the project.