



WE WORK THE WATERWAYS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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We Work the Waterways Helps Lead Workforce Development Efforts in First-of-Its-Kind Corn Belt Ports Maritime Consortium

May 7, 2026 — *We Work the Waterways* (WWW) is proud to serve as a key workforce development and engagement partner in the launch of the Corn Belt Ports Rural Logistics & Maritime Training & Education Consortium, a first-of-its-kind, multi-state collaboration focused on strengthening the inland maritime workforce pipeline across America's river system.

Bringing together ports, industry leaders, and an initial network of higher education institutions, including community and technical colleges, the consortium addresses one of the industry's most pressing challenges: developing a skilled workforce prepared to meet evolving supply chain demands.

WWW has played an active role in shaping the consortium's workforce strategy, contributing expertise in student engagement, career awareness, and industry-education alignment. Through its national programming and hands-on Maritime Interaction Days, WWW connects students directly with maritime professionals—creating early exposure and clear pathways into high-demand careers.

The consortium is focused on developing stackable, real-world career pathways aligned with employer needs across inland waterways and logistics, while expanding access in rural and river-connected communities where maritime careers are vital but often underrepresented.

"One of the biggest gaps in the maritime industry isn't opportunity – it's awareness. This consortium is a meaningful step toward closing that gap by connecting students to real career pathways and helping them see how to access these opportunities. We're proud to contribute our experience and help drive real outcomes for both students and industry," said Errin Howard, Executive Director of *We Work the Waterways*.

A key component of the consortium's early momentum is the participation of higher education partners committed to workforce training and credential development.

Participating Institutions (to date):

- Western Illinois University
- Culver-Stockton College
- Northeast Iowa Community College
- Eastern Iowa Community College
- Western Technical College
- Carl Sandburg College
- University of Wisconsin–La Crosse
- Black Hawk College
- Illinois Central College
- John Wood Community College

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These institutions will play a critical role in preparing students with the skills and credentials needed to enter and advance within the maritime workforce, while strengthening connections between education providers and industry employers.

The consortium launches at a pivotal time as national efforts intensify to strengthen the U.S. maritime workforce and supply chain resilience. By aligning resources across states, industries, and education systems, the initiative aims to build a more connected and sustainable talent pipeline.

“As a strong supporter of We Work the Waterways, it is exciting to partner with Corn Belt Ports on this initiative. WWW brings proven success in developing tomorrow’s maritime workforce, while Corn Belt Ports has demonstrated leadership in advancing awareness and funding across the region. Together, this collaboration brings significant expertise, and I’m excited for what’s ahead,” said Seth Lawson, owner of Lawson Rigging and Board President of We Work the Waterways.

The consortium’s first official meeting took place this week, marking the beginning of coordinated efforts to expand programming, deepen partnerships, and drive long-term workforce impact. Leaders are also exploring future opportunities for national recognition, including potential designation as a Maritime Center of Excellence through the Maritime Administration (MARAD).

About We Work the Waterways

We Work the Waterways is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to connecting students, educators, and communities with career opportunities in the maritime industry. Through hands-on learning experiences, industry partnerships, and career resources, WWW builds awareness and access to high-demand careers on and around the water.

For more information, visit www.weworkthewaterways.org



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