



666 High Street, Suite 200-B  
Worthington, OH 43085

PHONE: 614.565.8319  
EMAIL: [jlampert@americanwaterways.com](mailto:jlampert@americanwaterways.com)

Justin L. Lampert  
Director – Midcontinent Office

April 9, 2025

Appalachian Regional Commission  
1666 Connecticut Ave NW, Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20009

Re: ARC POWER Grant  
for SDPR Inland  
Waterways Maritime  
Academy

Dear Sir/Madam:

The American Waterways Operators (AWO) is the tugboat, towboat and barge industry's advocate, resource and united voice for safe, sustainable and efficient transportation on America's waterways, oceans and coasts. Our industry is the largest segment of the nation's 40,000-vessel domestic maritime fleet and moves 665 million tons of cargo each year safely, sustainably and efficiently. On behalf of AWO's more than 300 member companies, we support the Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen and Mountwest Community & Technical College [herein referred to as the applicants] application for the Appalachian Regional Commission's POWER Grant.

America's inland river system is vital to our nation's economic vitality and supports a robust and reliable supply chain both domestically and internationally. The Mid-Ohio Valley Port is the nation's largest inland port and in West Virginia and Ohio alone, the inland transportation system contributes almost \$3.25 billion in tax revenue and over \$90 billion in total economic output<sup>1</sup>. Equally important, barge transportation is the safest, for both mariners and the public, and the most environmentally sustainable mode of freight transportation.

Given the immense economic impact of America's inland waterway system, it is vital to support a robust employment pipeline for the industry. While the U.S. has one national and six state maritime academies, these schools have not traditionally been a significant source of candidates for inland marine operations, and the inland barge and towing industry has struggled for decades to find reliable employment pipelines to fill very well-paid positions. The applicants aim to provide the Appalachia region with a vital connection to this industry, giving residents access to this vital and well-compensated industry.

An inland waterways academy, such as the one proposed by the applicants, would provide residents and visitors with a significant opportunity to engage in the inland towing industry. The training simulator and other technologies funded by this grant will enable students to gain

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<sup>1</sup> [OH Waterways](#) & [WV Waterways](#)

practical training and hands-on experience toward obtaining a U.S. Coast Guard merchant mariner credential, offering them an advantage over individuals entering the industry without any experience. These funds will also enable the development of exhibits that highlight the significant, yet often underestimated, value of the inland maritime industry to the nation.

High school graduates can attain six-figure salaries within a decade of entering the industry. With the comprehensive training and awareness provided by this academy, supported by necessary funding, students will be well positioned to pursue these career opportunities, thereby supporting local families, economies, and the nation at large. This advantage is particularly crucial in the Appalachia region given the need for economic diversification due to the decline of legacy industries in the region.

In conclusion, AWO supports the establishment of the Inland Waterways Maritime Academy and application for the ARC POWER grant due to its substantial benefits for both the maritime industry and the region. It will provide the industry with access to qualified mariners and offer regional populations the opportunity to enter a well-paying sector with opportunities for substantial growth. AWO would be pleased to offer more information as the Commission sees fit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Justin Lampert". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Justin Lampert  
Director – Midcontinent Office