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OFTEN BACKED STATE

Noah denies corps forcing transfer

Associated Press

The St. Paul district head of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has described as "groundless" the fears of some environmentalists that he is being transferred because he has been too willing to side with the state rather than the corps.

Col. Max Noah, district engineer for 18 months, will leave in mid-December while the corps remains involved in several regional controversies. District engineers normally stay on the job at least three years.

Noah said Friday he is being assigned to a systems analysis position in headquarters of the Army training and doctrine command at Ft. Monroe, Va., because of his training and experience in that field.

In an interview, Noah expressed confidence that the corps' environmental awareness will continue to grow.

Although U.S. District Court has ordered that corps dredging activities comply with Minnesota laws, the federal government has appealed that decision. Noah said he has no authority to sign a stipulation agreement with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

One of the prime requirements in an agreement negotiated but not signed a year ago was that the corps conduct a monitoring program to determine effects of dredging operations on water quality.

"If the monitoring shows that dredging is having a seriously detrimental impact on water quality, I believe the corps will be willing to change its dredging practices," the colonel said. "I'm particularly concerned with suggestions that dredging could be resuspending PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) that had settled on the bottom, and we've got to take a hard look at that question as soon as possible."

Noah also said the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis will have to clarify whether the corps must provide water filtration for communities along the North Shore of Lake Superior under its own emergency powers or directly at the court's order.

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