

SEAN M. DUFFY, SR.

President & CEO | Big River Coalition, LLC | Duffy Maritime Consultants, LLC

“Advocating for a Mightier & Safer Mississippi River”

Executive Profile

Sean M. Duffy, Sr. is a recognized maritime advocate, policy strategist, and waterway commerce expert with more than three decades of leadership on the Mississippi River and its tributaries. As President and CEO of the Big River Coalition (BRC) and Duffy Maritime Consultants (DMC), Sean has directed some of the most significant advancements in waterway policy, infrastructure investment to the benefit of Ship Channel stability, and to advance navigational safety on the Mississippi River and Tributaries in the modern era.

Under his leadership, the Big River Coalition team has earned recognition as persistent and effective advocates for maritime commerce on the Mississippi River. The Coalition has documented the last decade (2016–2026) as the most challenging in modern history for deep-draft commerce on the Ship Channel, with unprecedented floods, historic droughts, saltwater intrusion crises, and complex federal legislative landscapes to keep the Ship Channel open and commerce flowing.

About the Big River Coalition, LLC

The Big River Coalition, LLC is the preeminent advocacy organization for maritime commerce on the Mississippi River Ship Channel. Effective January 1, 2026, the BRC transitioned from a long-established nonprofit to a limited liability company — a strategic evolution designed to accelerate growth, expand technology-driven solutions for navigational safety, and intensify focus on Deltaic Riverine Management.

The Mississippi River and Tributaries generate an estimated \$735 billion annual impact on the U.S. economy and support 2.4 million jobs across the Basin (31 states). The Mississippi River Ship Channel — which Mr. Duffy calls an “economic superhighway” — handles approximately 500 million short tons of cargo annually, representing 20 percent of total U.S. waterborne commerce. Every 24 hours, a minimum of \$300 million in cargo value alone transits the Ship Channel.

The Coalition is a dedicated to maritime advocacy for promoting the Mississippi River as the economic and ecological lifeline of our nation – advancing physical and technological infrastructure, collaborating with state and federal agencies on focused navigation policy that enhances maritime commerce and strengthens energy and freshwater security through the creative beneficial use of dredged material to strategically fortify the Ship Channel against impacts created by land loss and natural forces of climate variability.

Key Achievements & Legislative Impact

Mississippi River Ship Channel Deepening to 50 Feet

The Big River Coalition served as the principal industry lead for the historic deepening of the Mississippi River Ship Channel to 50 feet — the most significant infrastructure upgrade on the Lower Mississippi River in a generation. The BRC coordinated programmatic changes requiring amendments to two Acts of Congress to make the project possible. The deepened channel now spans 200 miles, from the Southwest Pass Sea Buoy to Philadelphia Point at Mile 180 Above Head of Passes (completed in phases: New Orleans 2022, Mile 175 in 2023, Mile 180 in 2025). The deepening project also restored 1,835 acres of wetlands through beneficial use of dredge material and was the first federal project to fulfill President Obama’s Executive Order #13514 requiring federal projects include positive environmental mitigation.

Governor Landry's Navigation & Safety Task Force

Partnered with the Task Force Chairman and Vice Chairman to develop a prioritized list of navigational improvements for the Louisiana Ports & Waterways Investment Commission, culminating in a comprehensive Final Report and actionable recommendations.

Coastal Zone Consistency & Wetlands Restoration

Led efforts to secure “Conditional” Coastal Zone Consistency for dredge material operations, beginning in 2009 that resulted in the largest wetlands restoration project in the world — an area of wetlands larger than Washington, DC has been restored. Created the Beneficial Use of Dredged Material Subcommittee in 2008, which eventually led to what the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers designated the “Mississippi River Deep-Draft Reclamation and Restoration” program. The stakeholder group includes state and federal agencies, pilot associations, dredge contractors, and the Big River Coalition representing the navigation industry and has restored over 16,000 acres of marsh in the environmentally sensitive birds'-foot delta.

Post-2019 Flood Legislative Response

Following the Record Flood of 2019 — which impacted an estimated \$6–\$7 billion in cargo transiting Southwest Pass — the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and industry partners called on the BRC to provide formal recommendations. Mr. Duffy's recommendations were subsequently introduced legislatively and included: \$200 million in increased USACE funding, the creation of Early Award Hopper Dredge contracts, and the establishment of the Regional Dredge Demonstration Program. These measures have contributed to the longest sustained period of full channel draft in the past decade.

NOAA Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System (PORTS) Expansion

Led the BRC's campaign to expand NOAA PORTS sensors on the Ship Channel. In 2025, the first new sensor since 2009 was installed at the Southwest Pass Sea Buoy. Two additional current meters are pending installation, with \$400,000 in federal funding secured by Senator Cassidy at BRC's request. Through the support of Governor Landry's office and the Louisiana DOTD, Air Gap Sensors have been funded for four additional Ship Channel bridges, with the Baton Rouge I-10 Dual System Air Gap Sensor activated in December 2025.

National Transportation Safety Board — Sunshine Bridge Allision

Following the Sunshine Bridge allision, the BRC submitted written testimony to the NTSB and identified a calculation error in the vertical clearance formula used by both the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Coast Guard. Both federal agencies accepted the correction and adjusted their methodology — a correction that became foundational to the Navigation & Safety Task Force Recommendations and informed subsequent applications for NOAA PORTS funding.

Keynote and Featured Speaker

Sean has spoken before multiple federal and state agencies to represent challenges and solutions to promote and protect safe navigation, coastal restoration and riverine economics. He has briefed Congressional offices on policy and funding changes needed to protect maritime commerce and has been routinely featured by dozens of maritime associations. He engages with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from the New Orleans District to Vicksburg District including the Mississippi River Commission and at Headquarters and represented navigation before the National Transportation Safety Board and the President's Oil Spill Commission. Mr. Duffy has also presented to students at the University of Alabama, Delgado Community College, the University of Georgia, Louisiana State University, Loyola University, the University of New Orleans, and Tulane University.

Associations, Boards & Appointed Positions

- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Federal Advisory Committee — Hydrographic Services Review Panel: Past Chairman
- Congressman and U.S. House Majority Leader Steve Scalise’s Maritime Advisory Group
- Governor Jeff Landry’s Navigation and Safety Task Force
- Louisiana Ports, Waterways and Investment Commission
- Mississippi River 100 (MR100) Visioning Committee
- Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (Louisiana): Coastal Advisory Team
- American Petroleum Institute’s Maritime Infrastructure Coalition
- National Waterways Conference: Executive Committee
- National Association of Maritime Organizations: Board of Directors
- Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development’s Freight Advisory Council
- Mississippi River Basin Stakeholder Advisory Team (USACE & Institute for Water Resources)
- Propeller Club Port of New Orleans: Board of Directors (Past President)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Mississippi Valley New Orleans — Beneficial Use of Dredged Material Subcommittee Creator
- Saltwater Intrusion Working Group
- Waterways Council, Inc.
- Making Sense of Sensors Alliance: Chairman
- Tulane Maritime Law MentorSHIP Program: Mentor
- Green Marine Associate Member
- Committee of 100 — Louisiana’s Business Roundtable
- Mississippi Valley Trade and Transport Council: Past Chairman

Awards, Recognitions & Professional Development

- 2026** Propeller Club of the Port of New Orleans — Maritime Person of the Year
- 2025** International Propeller Club — Lifetime Achievement Award
- 2025** Coastal Leadership Institute Graduate (Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana)
- 2024** Louisiana Master Naturalist — Greater New Orleans Certification
- 2023** New Orleans CityBusiness Port & Maritime Power List
- 2022** C. Alvin Bertel Award — World Trade Center of New Orleans
- 2022** Admiralty Legend
- 2021** U.S. Coast Guard Certificate of Merit
- 2020** Texas A&M Dredging Engineering Short Course Certification (50th Year)
- 2018** Global Maritime Ministries — Crystal Lighthouse Award: Maritime Person of the Year
- 2018** American Infrastructure Project of the Year — Mississippi River Ship Channel Deepening
- 2017** CG/LA Job Creation Project of the Year — Mississippi River Ship Channel Deepening
- 2016** Coastal Innovator Award — American Shore and Beach Preservation Association