

Coast Guard orders additional waterways commerce cutters



From Headquarters, U.S. Coast Guard, Sept. 30, 2025

WASHINGTON – The Coast Guard is moving forward with the acquisition of the new Waterways Commerce Cutter (WCC) class, designed to replace the legacy fleet of inland tenders and facilitate commerce vital to the nation’s economic security and strategic mobility.

The service has ordered production of the first river buoy tender (WLR) and long lead time material (LLTM) for the second inland construction tender (WLIC), with construction to take place at Birdon America, Inc.’s shipyard in Bayou La Batre, Alabama.

In addition, the Coast Guard has placed an order for three sets of LLTM to support future production. The total value of the production and LLTM orders is approximately \$110 million.

Funding includes \$51 million provided by Public Law 119-21,

the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, which covers production of the second WLIC and two sets of LLTM. The balance of the order is funded through regular appropriations.

“Our nation’s marine transportation system facilitates over \$5.4 trillion in economic activity every year and supports millions of jobs throughout the United States,” said Rear Adm. Mike Campbell, the Coast Guard’s Director of Systems Integration and Chief Acquisition Officer. “Putting new waterways commerce cutters on contract ensures we have the capabilities needed to support the safe and efficient flow of commerce in our inland waterways systems.”

Inland construction tenders play a critical role in constructing, repairing, and maintaining fixed aids to navigation (ATON) along the Eastern Seaboard and Gulf Coast. These cutters are uniquely equipped to drive and remove piles, erect towers, and perform major structural modifications. Construction of the first WLIC, ordered in June 2025, is expected to be completed in 2027.

River buoy tenders service short-range ATON on the Western Rivers, setting, relocating, and recovering buoys to mark navigable channels as water levels fluctuate. They also establish and maintain fixed aids, lights, and daybeacons. Construction of the first WLR is expected to be completed in 2027. Both WLICs and WLRs are being acquired under the same contract due to their substantial design similarities.

The WCCs will replace the legacy inland tender fleet, which has an average vessel age of nearly 60 years, including ships still in service at 81 years old. The Coast Guard inland fleet maintains more than 28,200 marine aids across 12,000 miles of inland waterways, facilitating the movement of approximately 630 million tons of cargo annually.

Modernizing this fleet will bolster the Coast Guard’s capacity to control, secure and defend U.S. ports and waterways,

ensuring the safe and efficient flow of commerce vital to the nation's economic and strategic interests. This modernization is aligned with Force Design 2028, a blueprint introduced by Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem to transform the Coast Guard into a more agile, capable and responsive fighting force.