

**Testimony of the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association  
Regarding Management of the Upper Mississippi River System and the  
Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program**

**Submitted to the  
House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment**

**April 10, 2019**

Chair Napolitano, Ranking Member Westerman, and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate today's opportunity to underscore the value of investing in both the economic vitality and ecological integrity of our nation's rivers. The Upper Mississippi River Basin Association (UMRBA) was formed in 1981 by the Governors of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin to facilitate dialogue and cooperative action and to serve as an advocate of the states' collective interests. UMRBA works closely with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other federal agencies to achieve a shared commitment to integrated, multi-purpose management of the Upper Mississippi River's economic and ecological uses.

On the Upper Mississippi River, we have proven that navigation traffic as well as other economic uses can be fully supported within healthy riverine ecosystems. Our nation's rivers can serve simultaneously as economic engines and ecological treasurers. We can have both, and we are better for it. In order for our nation to fully realize the potential of our rivers, we must value and integrate management of their many purposes and uses. The river is both a multi-billion dollar economic engine and a treasured ecosystem abundant with fish and wildlife – generating revenues in excess of \$600 billion annually and supporting over 1.86 million jobs in manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, recreation, navigation, and energy sectors. At the same time, the river also provides an irreplaceable water supply source for citizens and industries throughout the Midwest. The system of locks and dams provides for the movement of low-cost goods that are essential to a strong national economy: gravel, fertilizers and agricultural commodities, salt, and energy products. At the same time, the Upper Mississippi supports a \$55 billion tourism and recreation industry built upon the serenity and adventure of the river's landscape and abundant opportunities for fishing and hunting.

UMRBA, along with navigation industry, conservation interests, and local and federal partners, made a very conscious decision to seek collaboration – shared solutions – rather than remain hamstrung and steadfast in conflict. There is a long history of conflict between economic and ecological interests on the Upper Mississippi River. But the most contentious time occurred in the 1970s, following enactment of new laws that gave environmental interests legal standing (i.e., National Environmental Policy Act, Clean Water Act) and when the American economy was experiencing severe inflation and the value of the inland waterways as a transportation system was magnified. Conflicts raged over navigation use and environmental resources on the river. Can they co-exist? How much navigation traffic is too much? Ultimately, the conflict turned into litigation when a second lock chamber was proposed at L&D 26 in the mid-1970s, with the primary argument that the Corps did not evaluate the system-wide impacts of the second lock to the ecosystem.

The court halted L&D 26 replacement. Congress claimed that it had too little information to take action and tasked the then-federal-state Upper Mississippi River Basin Commission with resolving those contentious questions and making recommendation for how to best manage the river, balancing the demands of competing interests. Congress said no action could be taken to increase navigation until a plan was finalized and Congress had approved it.

Ultimately, the conclusion was that balanced management is achievable and is in our nation's interest. In 1986, Congress authorized the second chamber at L&D 26 along with a system-wide ecosystem restoration and scientific monitoring program, known today as the Upper Mississippi River Restoration program, and the declaration that the Upper Mississippi River is both a nationally significant navigation system and a nationally significant ecosystem.

Shortly after, navigation industry began considering modernization needs on the Upper Mississippi River at a larger scale. UMRBA joined with federal partners, navigation industry, and environmental interests to take the same approach of collaboration and agreed to the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP) – a comprehensive and integrated plan for meeting current and future shipping demands, stimulating economic growth, and improving the health and resilience of the river ecosystem. NESP's feasibility study was completed in 2004 and Congress authorized it in 2007. NESP enjoys consensus among diverse stakeholders and bipartisan and bicameral support among Congress as well as steadfast commitment by the Governors of the five Upper Mississippi River basin states.

Reaching the commitment to integrated, multi-purpose management was incredibly challenging, but it has paid tremendous dividends. We moved the region from conflict to collaboration, and in doing so, we moved it from the gridlock of litigation to a whole new world of opportunity. There is far greater power in standing for something, not against it. NESP forges allegiances – allies who can give Congress a solution, a hard-fought consensus; not a problem that needs to be fixed; not a choice Congress has to make between competing interests. NESP gives us solutions, and a concrete path to work for. Guidewall extensions and mooring cells, lock modernization at the most congested sites on the Upper Miss, and islands, backwater complexes, and forests that are essential for a diverse and complex array of fish and wildlife species.

We appreciate this Committee's support of NESP and the Upper Mississippi River as a nationally significant resource.



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