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July 10, 2019

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY:
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
COMMITTEE HEARING
“WATER RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT ACTS: STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSING
FUTURE NEEDS”**

Chairman DeFazio and members of the United States House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony regarding the Water Resources Development Act and the Missouri River. As chairman of the Missouri Levee and Drainage District Association, I represent levee and drainage districts, businesses, associations and individuals interested in the activities and issues surrounding the Missouri River and its tributaries. I understand the importance of this committee’s work as it relates to flood control and the protection of human lives and property. I am honored to have this opportunity to provide comments on behalf of the levee association’s membership and fellow Missourians who have been impacted by flooding this year.

I am a seventh generation Missouri farmer. My family farming operation produces corn, soybeans, and wheat in the highly productive bottomlands along the Missouri River. As president of three local levee and drainage districts, I know and understand the importance levees and flood control projects play in protecting the lives and property in my community and communities across our nation.

2019, has been a difficult year for people living and working along the Missouri River. The Missouri River system was overwhelmed by inflows well above any seen before. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been tasked with managing record-breaking runoff into the Missouri River Flood Control System this year. The extraordinary runoff proved to be too much for the Army Engineers to handle and the result was major flooding from above Sioux City, Iowa to St. Louis, Missouri, along the River and several tributaries.

My testimony will center around three points. 1) Recent flooding and funding needs for levee repairs and flood recovery, 2) Desperately needed changes in the management and operations of the Missouri River Reservoir System, and 3) Long-term improvements to flood control infrastructure across the nation. In addition to these comments, I have attached an article, I wrote in April, about this year’s flood and the Missouri River.

2019 Missouri River Flooding

The 2019, Missouri River Flood is not over. High flows on the Missouri River will continue well into summer as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers continues to release water from the mainstem reservoir system in the Upper Missouri River Basin. In addition to the mainstem system, reservoirs in Kansas and in the Missouri Osage Basins have an over abundant supply of water, which will have to be released during the same time period. These releases will combine to keep Missouri River flows above flood stage at most locations. Any additional heavy rainfall will cause additional flooding.

The, now infamous, “Bomb Cyclone” hitting Nebraska and South Dakota early this spring brought snow and heavy rain which overwhelmed the Missouri River flood control system. The bomb cyclone was followed by a second round of heavy snow and rain later in the spring causing even more damage throughout the Missouri River Basin. Levees have been overtopped, breached and eroded by the high-water event. Communities have been inundated, homes and businesses lost and in rural areas, farmers have lost not only their homes, but also their 2018 crops stored in flooded bins, their machinery and their livestock. Hopes for planting a crop this year have dwindled away as the river continues to scour across flooded fields.

Flooding in the Midwest impacts the entire country. The Missouri Department of Transportation closed more than 470 different routes in 114 counties from April 29 to June 14. Many remained closed today. Railroad tracks were washed out and train traffic was stopped and disrupted by delays and re-routing. Flooding hindered the movement of products through the states of Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas with impacts across the entire nation. Barge traffic on the Missouri River was also disrupted.



The flood control system of levees, which has been weakened by years of lack of improvement, has been decimated. The following is a list of levees overtopped or breached in the Kansas City, Omaha and St. Louis Corps of Engineer Districts:

Kansas City District Levee Status

Federal Levees Overtopped

March Event Overtoppings

MRLS 500-R (KS) Iowa Point Drainage District No. 4 (First Federal Levee to overtop since 1993) Doniphan, KS March 21

Federal Levees that have Breached:

MRLS 246-L Brunswick-Dalton Levee District, Chariton County, May 31

Non-Federal Levees that have Breached:

March Event Breaches

Union Township Levee (MO), Holt County, March 16
Holt County 10 Levee (MO), Holt County, March 16
Holt County 9 Levee (MO), Holt County, March 18
Rushville-Sugar Lake Levee, Platte County, March 21
Platte County #1 Section #1 Tie-Back Levee
Platte County #1 Section #2 Tie-Back Levee
Walcott Drainage District #1 Levee, Wyandotte County, KS, March 23
Corning Levee, Holt County, March 16

Recent Breaches

Brunswick Levee. Carroll County, May 23
DeWitt Levee, Carroll County, May 23
Mi-De Levee, Carroll County, May 23
Labadie Section #4 Levee (Intentional), Franklin County, May 22
Cambridge Levee, Saline County, May 23
Lower Morrison Bottom Levee, Gasconade County, May 28
Prison Farm Levee, Cole County, May 28
Northeastern Saline Levee,
Saline County Levee, May 28
Saline County #2 Levee, Saline County, May 28
Garden of Eden #1 Levee, Chariton County, May 30
Garden of Eden #2 Levee,
Chariton County Levee, May 30
Garden of Eden #3 Levee, Chariton County May 31
West Glasgow Levee, Saline County, May 30
Tri-County Drainage District Levee (Ray, Clay, Jackson Counties) Ray County, June 1
Belcher Lozier Levee
Reveaux Levee, Callaway County, June 1
Sugartree Bottom Levee (Intentional), Carroll County, June 1
Howard County #4 Levee, Howard County June 1
Howard County #7 Levee, Howard County, June 4
Levasy Levee (Not in PL84-99 Program) June 1
Cooper County #1 Levee, Osage County, May 30
Bonne Femme Levee, Howard County June 1
Ray-Carroll Levee, Ray/Carroll Counties May 31
Renz Levee, Callaway County, June 7
Capitol View Levee, Callaway County, June 7

Non-Federal Levees that have Overtopped

March Event Overtoppings

Canon Levee (MO), Holt County, March 20
Grape-Bollin-Schwartz Levee (KS), Leavenworth/Atchison Counties, KS, March 20
Bean Lake Levee (MO), Platte County, March 20
Henry Pohl Levee (KS), Atchison County, KS, March 21

Kansas Department of Corrections Levee, Leavenworth County, KS, March 23

Walcott Drainage District #2 Levee, Wyandotte County, KS, March 23

Walcott Drainage District#3 Levee, Wyandotte County, KS, March 23

Recent Overtoppings

Ray-Carroll Levee Overtopping Stopped with flood fight and intact

Howard Bend #3 Levee, Section 1

Cooper County #1 Levee

Howard County #6 Levee, Howard County, May 23

Howard County #3 Levee, Section 2, Howard County, May 31

Howard County #3 Levee, Section 1, Howard County, May 23

Howard County #2 Levee, Howard County, May 31

Chamois #1 Levee

Chamois #2 Levee, Osage County, May 24

Chamois A-1 Levee

Diermann Levee, Gasconade County, May 24

Jacobs Levee, Callaway County, May 24

Tebbetts East Levee, Callaway County, May 24

Tuque Creek Levee, Warren County, May 25

McBaine Levee, Boone County, May 27

Big Bend Levee, Carroll County, May 29

Whitman Levee, Chariton, May 29

Wainwright Levee, Callaway County, June 1

Malta Bend Levee, Saline County June 1

Henrietta-Crooked River Levee, Ray County June 1

Plowboy Levee, Moniteau County, May 24

Linneman-Weekly Levee, Cooper County, May 23

Egypt Levee

Hartsburg #1 Levee

Hartsburg Levee #2 Levee

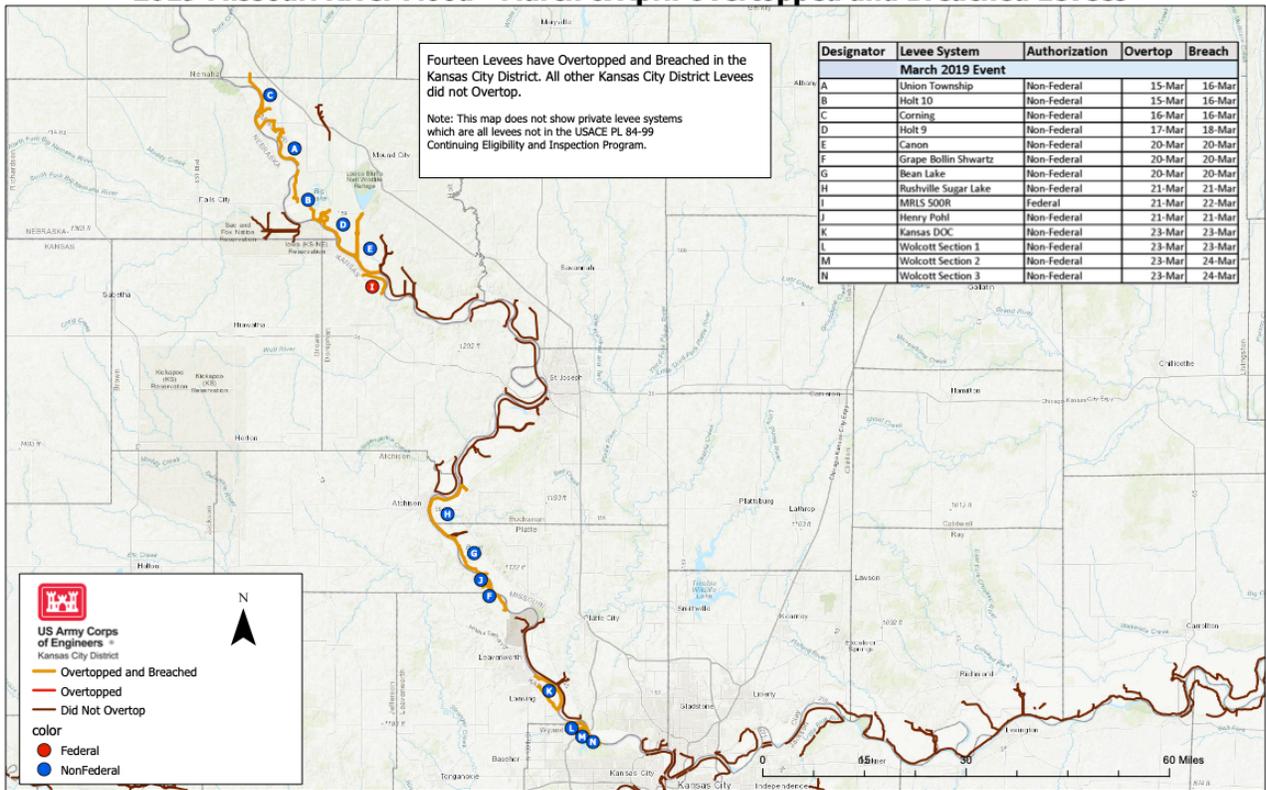
Hartsburg #3 Levee, Boone County May 31

Mokane Levee

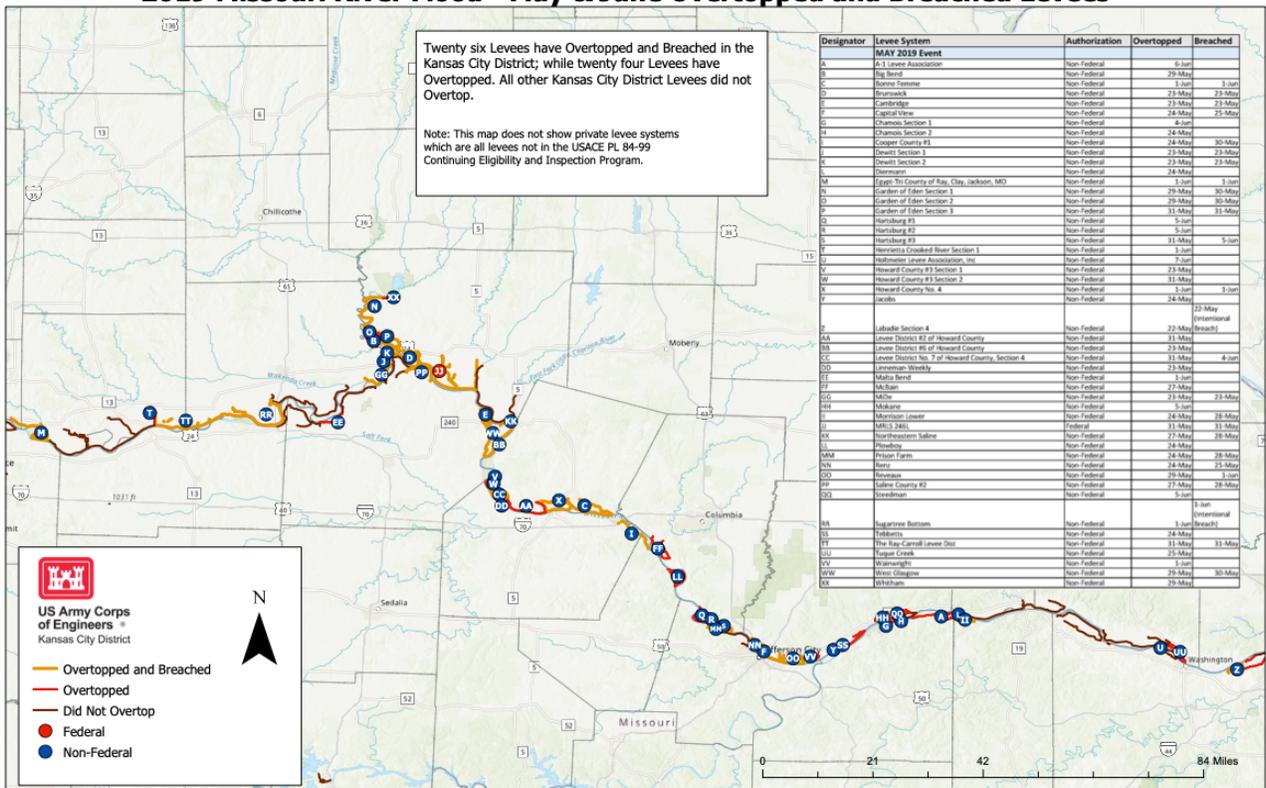
Steedman Levee

Holtmeier Levee Association

2019 Missouri River Flood - March & April Overtopped and Breached Levees



2019 Missouri River Flood - May & June Overtopped and Breached Levees



Omaha District Levee Status

Levee System Status as of May 31, 2019

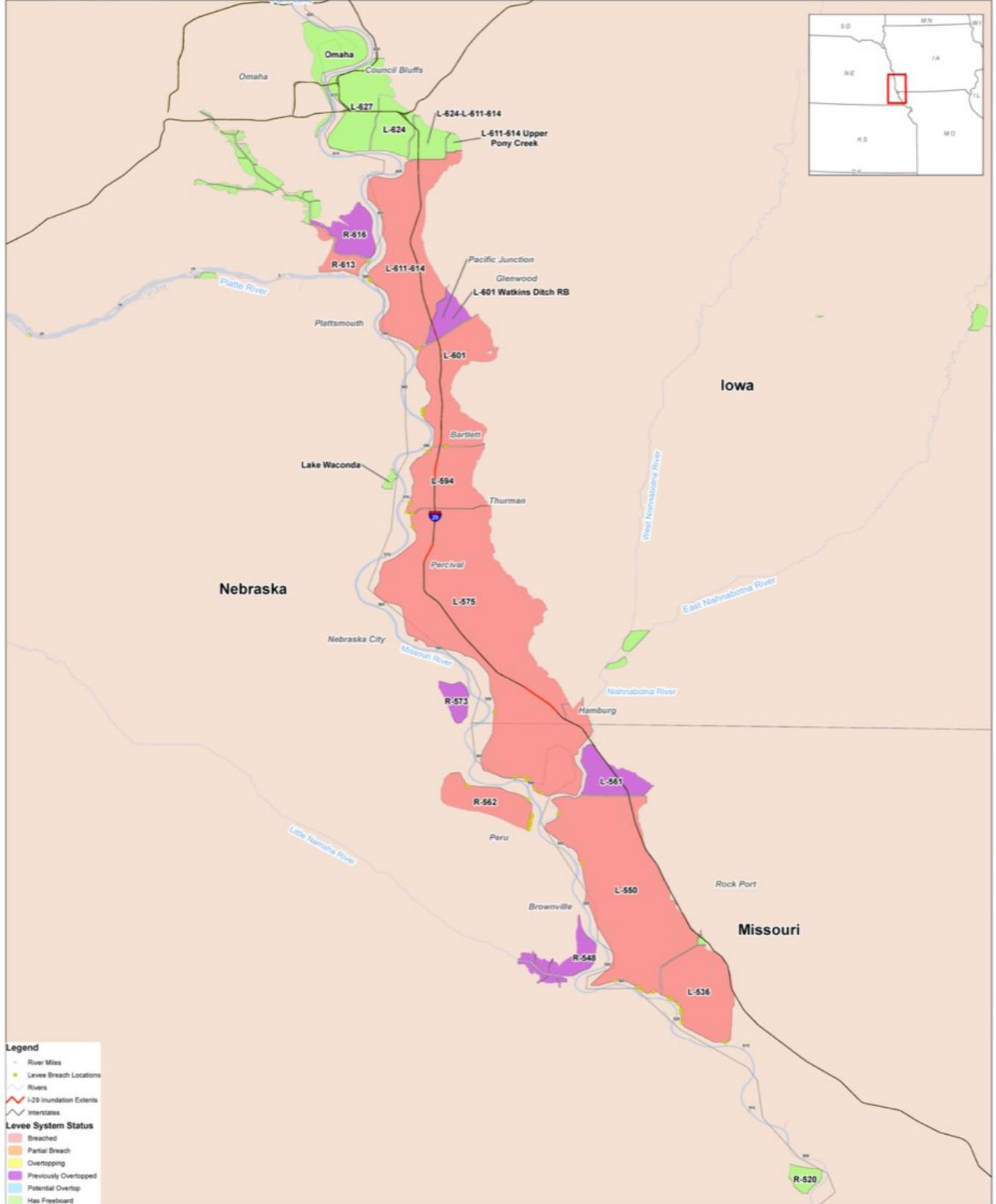
Reference Location	River	Levee System	Last Update	PL84-99 Program Participation	Previously Overtopped	# of Breaches		Initial Breach Repaired
Council Bluffs, IA	Missouri		L611-614		05/31/19	Federal	x	3
Glenwood, IA	Missouri		L601		05/31/19	Federal	x	4
Glenwood, IA	Watkins Ditch		L601- Watkins Ditch RB		04/04/19	Federal	x	
Fremont County, IA	Missouri		L594		05/31/19	Federal	x	5
Hamburg, IA	Missouri		L575		05/31/19	Federal	x	7
Hamburg, IA	Nishnabotna		L561		04/04/19	Federal	x	
Atchinson County, MO	Missouri		L550		05/20/19	Federal	x	7
Atchinson County, MO	Missouri		L536		04/04/19	Federal	x	7
Sarpy County, NE	Missouri		R616-613			Federal	x	1
Sarpy County, NE	Missouri		R616		04/04/19	Federal	x	
Sarpy County, NE	Missouri		R613		04/04/19	Federal	x	1
Otoe County, NE	Missouri		R573		04/04/19	Federal	x	
Nemaha County, NE	Missouri		R562		04/04/19	Federal	x	10
Brownville, MO	Missouri		R548		04/04/19	Federal	x	
Rulo, NE	Missouri		R520		04/04/19	Federal		
Sarpy County, NE	Platte		Western Sarpy		04/04/19	Federal	x	
Clear Creek, NE	Platte		Clear Creek		04/16/19	Federal	x	4
Valley, NE	Platte		Union Dike		04/16/19	Non-Federal	x	1
Ames, NE	Platte		Ames Diking		04/04/19	Non-Federal	x	1
Louisville, NE	Platte		YMCA Camp Kitaki		04/04/19	Non-Federal	x	
Cass County, NE	Missouri		Lake Wa Con-Da		04/04/19	Non-Federal	Boils	



US Army Corps
of Engineers
Omaha District

Omaha District Levee Status

Missouri River Levees



St. Louis District Levee Status-Mississippi River

Breaches

Brevator Levee
Winfield Main Levee
Pike Grain #3 Levee (Intentional)
Pike Grain #4 Levee
Kissinger Levee
Elsberry Levee
Chouteau Island Levee
Elm Point Levee
Kuhs Levee
Ste. Genevieve #2 Levee (Intentional)
Winfield Pin Oaks Levee
Nutwood Levee

Overtoppings

Foley Levee
King's Lake Levee
Sandy Creek Levee
Consolidated North County Levee
Greens Bottom #1 Levee
Greens Bottom #2 Levee
Bluffdale Farms Levee
Robertson Mutual Levee
Keach Levee
Hillview Levee
Schaefer Levee
Eldred Levee



St. Louis District Flood Event Status Map

** Flood-fighting efforts not accounted for in projection

13 Jun 2019 @ 1300 HRS

Note: Federally Constructed Levees: Upper case.
Non-Federally Constructed Levees: Lower case.

Levee Status*

- 3+ ft Freeboard No Distress
- 0.5 to 3.0 ft Freeboard Possible Moderate Distress
- Less than 0.5 ft Freeboard at Crest Possible Significant Distress
- Overtopped
- LOP Not Restored (Previous breach of inactive system)

Locks and Dams Status

(I) PL84-99 Inactive

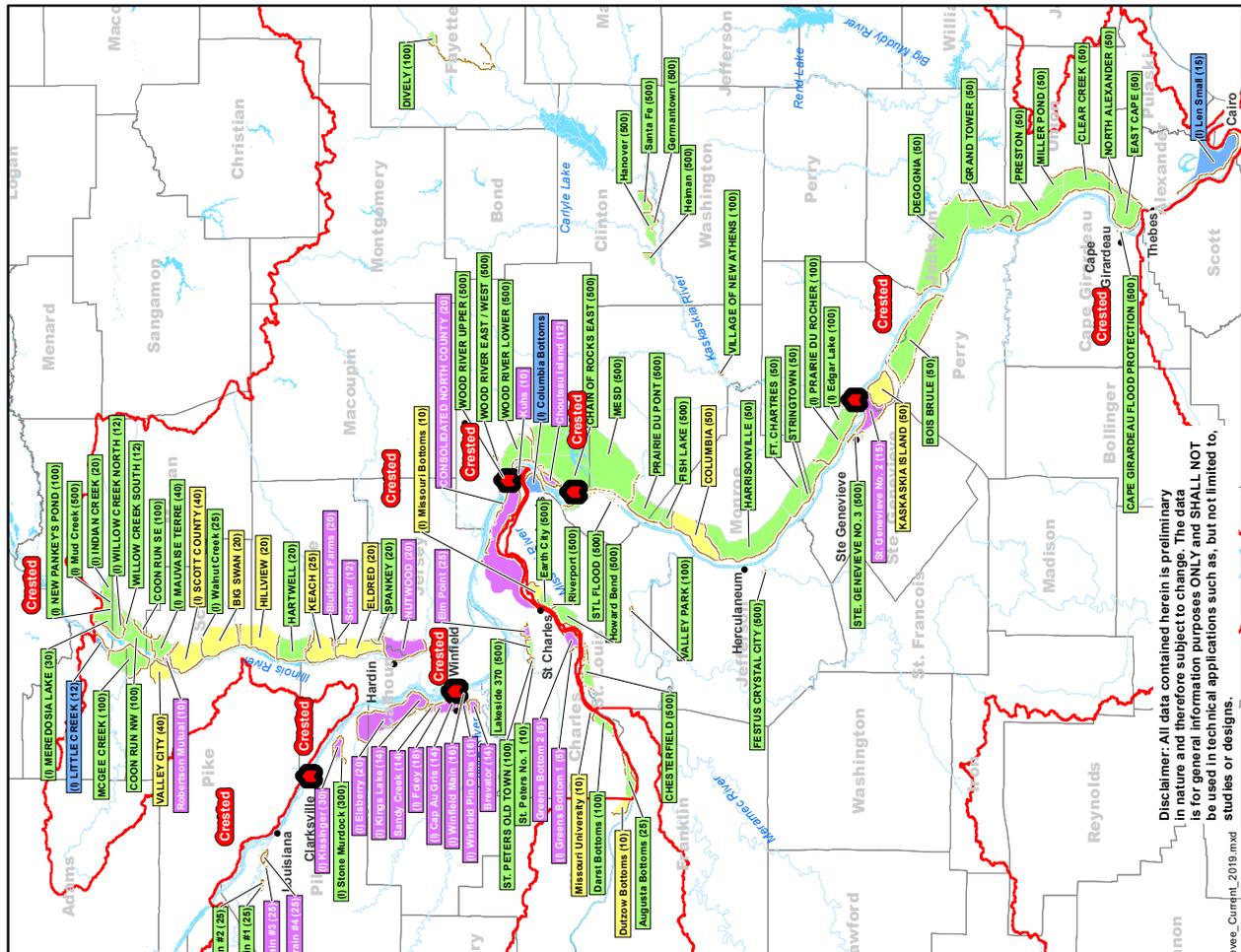
Locks and Dams Status

- Closed
- Open
- Restricted
- Open

Gage Status

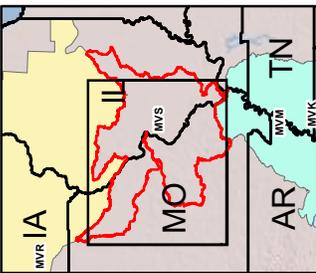
Crest Date

*Predictions based on National Weather Service forecast and field observations.



NAME	LEVEE TYPE	PL-84-99 ACTIVE	FED	ACRES
Big Swan	Agricultural	Yes	Yes	13534
Burfield Farms	Agricultural	Yes	No	725
Brevator Levee	Agricultural	Yes	No	2145
Chouteau Island	Agricultural	Yes	No	1953
Columbia	Agricultural	Yes	Yes	13806
Consolidated North County	Agricultural	Yes	Yes	35403
Dutzow Bottoms	Agricultural	Yes	No	7300
Eldred	Agricultural	Yes	Yes	9425
Elm Point	Agricultural	Yes	No	1342
Elberbery / King's Lake	Agricultural	No	No	22091
Foley / Cap Au Gris / Winfield Main	Agricultural	No	No	6062
Greens Bottom 1	Agricultural	No	No	95
Greens Bottom 2	Agricultural	Yes	No	3222
Hillview	Agricultural	Yes	Yes	13445
Kaskaskia Island	Agricultural	Yes	Yes	9240
Keach	Agricultural	Yes	Yes	9361
Kissinger	Agricultural	No	No	2508
Kuhs	Agricultural	Yes	No	1905
Missouri Bottoms	Agricultural	No	No	2674
Missouri University	Agricultural	Yes	Yes	11046
Nutwood	Agricultural	Yes	Yes	128
Pike Grain Levee No. 3	Agricultural	Yes	No	826
Pike Grain Levee No. 4	Agricultural	Yes	No	692
Robertson Mutual	Agricultural	Yes	No	896
Sandy Creek	Agricultural	Yes	No	275
Schafer	Agricultural	Yes	Yes	11124
St. Genevieve No. 2	Agricultural	Yes	No	7857
Valley City	Agricultural	Yes	Yes	4771
Winfield Pin Oaks	Agricultural	No	No	1733

Disclaimer: All data contained herein is preliminary in nature and therefore subject to change. The data is for general informational purposes ONLY and SHALL NOT be used in technical applications such as, but not limited to, studies or designs.



Scale: 0, 5, 10, 20 Miles

North Arrow

DISCLAIMER: While the United States Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District, has made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the information presented herein, it is not responsible for any errors or omissions, or for any consequences arising from the use of the information. The USACE is not liable for any damages, including consequential damages, arising from the use of the information. The USACE is not liable for any damages, including consequential damages, arising from the use of the information. The USACE is not liable for any damages, including consequential damages, arising from the use of the information.

St. Louis District
Emergency Management
MVS Spring 2019 Flood

Levee Repairs and Recovery

The Kansas City District Corps of Engineers Emergency Management office estimates recovery and levee rehabilitation from this year's flood event will be the largest rehabilitation program in their district since the great flood of 1993. They expect to receive between 80 and 90 requests for assistance from levee sponsors. Many of these have already been received and more requests continue to come into the office as levee sponsors assess damages. Damage will range from loss of grass cover from top and side wash to eroded levees and full-blown breaches with some systems having multiple breaches.



USDA is also assessing damages and planning for many requests for assistance recovering land damaged by the fast and destructive river flows. Assistance for damaged fields, flooded grain bins, lost crops and lost livestock will all be a part of the USDA programs to help farmers damaged by the flooding. But none of it will be enough to cover all the loss and suffering many farmers are facing. Crop insurance never covers all the farmer's losses and USDA assistance usually comes with some sort of cost-share farmers can find hard to match. The agricultural economy has been struggling and during some of the worse times for agriculture in recent years, this devastating flood will cause some farmers to lose their business. In some cases, farms handed down for generations will be lost.

Congress must act quickly to fund levee repairs. The recovery from the most recent flood events prior to this year has been slow and painful. Some levees along the Missouri River still had not been fully repaired from flooding in 2015, when this year's flood hit. In some cases, it has taken 3-4 years to complete the levee rehabilitation process. The recovery from this year's event must be handled better.

At this time, it is difficult to assess flood damage. The continuing high flows from upper basin reservoirs are preventing Corps of Engineers teams from completing damage assessments. It will take time for these teams to be able to do their work and have a good idea of the expenses related to the levee repairs. Once this work is completed, levee sponsors will need Congress to act quickly to make funding available for the repairs. Communities, business, property owners and the states economies all depend on levee protection and they are depending on Congress to act quickly with enough funding to meet their needs.



The number one industry in Missouri is Agriculture. With one-third of the grain produced in Missouri coming from the 100-year floodplain, the state's economy is directly impacted by flooding and by levee breaches left unrepaired. The flow required to flood this highly productive land is much less when levees are left unrepaired. Levee sponsors rely on Congress to provide the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers the needed funding for levee repairs

Delays in funding for repairs hamper an already slow and cumbersome process. I fear additional flooding and losses as we wait for levees to be repaired along the lower Missouri River. I hope this committee and all members of Congress will act quickly and decisively to push the Corps forward with funding and oversight to see the repairs are made as soon as possible.

Missouri River Reservoir Operations

The Missouri River Flood Control System has been hijacked and it is no longer being used to provide flood control as it was designed. For over 20 years, the Corps of Engineers has been forced by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to manage the system to conduct super-sized science experiments for two birds and one fish. The threatened and endangered interior least tern, piping plover and pallid sturgeon. These failed experiments have included: changing system storage amounts and how water is released, notching dikes, revetments and other structures in the river, opening chutes and channels along the river, and even causing intentional flooding. The experiments have weakened the system's ability to provide flood control and the result has been flooding of greater magnitude and frequency.



Flood control must be the number one priority for the management and operation of the Missouri River Reservoir System. We have reached a tipping point and we can no longer continue to conduct failed experiment after failed experiment at the expense of people's lives and livelihoods. Missouri and Iowa farmland was not meant to be the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's laboratory and midwestern farmers no longer want to be their guinea pigs.



After changes in the Missouri River Master Water Control Manual in 2004, the Corps has been trying to manage and operate the system equally for all eight authorized uses for the system. The simple fact is all uses are not equal and the system cannot be managed to make them equal. The system was built and designed to provide flood control. Like anything else, when one uses something for a purpose it was not designed for, more often than not it fails. This is true with the Missouri River Reservoir System. You cannot put a gallon of water in a quart jar and you cannot dismantle the system of dikes and structures, open chutes to send water out of the channel, misallocate stored water, conduct experiments for fish and birds, and expect to provide flood control. The system must be used the way it was designed. It must be used for flood control. We have seen what happens when flood control is not the top priority for the system. Lives have been ruined, businesses lost, and people have died.



Need for Flood Control Infrastructure Improvements

The decline of our flood control infrastructure is not limited to the Missouri River. The lack of emphasis on flood control over the past 20-plus years and the current inadequate infrastructure must be addressed as a national priority. Congress must act together to correct the problem.

Flooding occurs nearly every day somewhere in the United States. In his testimony during a recent U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works field hearing, Major General Scott A. Spellmon, Deputy Commanding General for Civil and Emergency Operations, United States Army Corps of Engineers, opened his remarks with a brief review of the many places across the country impacted by flooding this year. He said, *“At one point, over 300 river gauges indicated a flood stage somewhere in the Nation, and there were over 183 reported ice jams on rivers across the northern portion of the country.”* He went on to describe flooding occurring in Ohio, the Vicksburg Corps District, the Corps’ Memphis District, North Dakota, Colorado, California, Oregon and of course along much of the Missouri River.

The long list of flooding locations serves to remind us the lack of attention to flood control infrastructure over the past several years is a national problem, which impacts nearly every corner of the country. Floods do not discriminate. They do not choose democrats over republicans or vice versa. Floods don’t choose rich over poor, north over south or east over west. Flood control is not a partisan issue. It is an issue impacting the entire country and as such, the entire Congress should support prioritizing flood control infrastructure as money for infrastructure projects is appropriated.

In conclusion, this committee needs to remain aware of the ongoing flooding along the Missouri River. The flood is not over and the people of the Midwest and the River itself will need your leadership, guidance and support to recover from this devastating disaster.

Flood control must be the number one priority for the operation and management of the Missouri River. Using the system for fish and bird experiments has degraded the effectiveness of the flood control system and costs our country billions of dollars.

There is a nationwide need for improvements to the country’s flood control infrastructure. Improvements need to start here and now with this committee and with Congress. The failure to address the need for flood control infrastructure will lead to more flooding of greater magnitude and frequency.

Without flood control transportation and commerce are interrupted, sewer and water supply are put at risk, and some of the nation’s best farmland is left out of production. Without flood control people’s lives are put at risk and yes, people die. Simply put, without flood control, nothing else matters.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments to your committee. I look forward to working with each of you to help reduce flooding across the nation and provide better protection to the American people.

Tom Waters, Chairman
Missouri Levee & Drainage District Association

Attachment

Flooding: Where We Are, Where We've Been and Where We Need to Go

By Tom Waters

April, 2019

The flood of 2019, wreaked havoc in Missouri, Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska. From Omaha to Kansas City over 100 breaches in levees allowed the Missouri River to spread across some of the nation's most productive farmland and through Missouri and Iowa communities. In each case, levees performed as designed. However, the volume and velocity of the River exceeded the design of the flood control system.

Heavy snow and rain running into the River caused it to rise to record levels. Most of the runoff entered the River below Fort Randall Dam. Water running into Lewis and Clark Lake (Gavins Point Dam) had to be released through the dam, because the Lewis and Clark Reservoir has little to no storage available. It is a regulation dam, which means what comes into the lake must be released. Compounding the excessive rain and snow event was a breach of the Spencer Dam on the Niobrara River in Nebraska, allowing even more water to run into Lewis and Clark Lake. The system was overwhelmed and could not handle the amount of water being released by reservoir operators working for the US Army Corps of Engineers.

The Bomb Cyclone which brought heavy snow and rain happened quickly and did not allow time for thousands of citizens to move grain, equipment, property and belongings out of harm's way. The result is millions of bushels of grain loss, homes destroyed, livestock losses and lives ruined. One farmer I talked to lost his home, his machinery, and over half his 2018 crop, which was stored in grain bins. He will not be able to plant a crop in 2019, and doubts his bank will loan him money to recover and continue to farm in the future. This 5th generation farmer is only one example of thousands suffering from the lack of flood protection needed to prevent Missouri River flooding.

For decades, the federal government has focused Missouri River Operations on fish and wildlife. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has used the Endangered Species Act as a huge hammer to force the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to change the way the flood control system is operated on the Missouri River, resulting in an incapacitated flood control system. The Missouri River is a highly engineered river. In the upper basin, above Yankton, South Dakota, the world's largest system of dams and reservoirs were built to capture snow melt and spring runoff. Below Yankton, levees and smaller lakes and reservoirs provide flood protection as water is released from the system above. Sadly, the system, as originally designed, was never finished and the Pick-Sloan Plan for the Missouri River never reached its intended potential.

The system was originally built for flood control. Along with flood control, engineers designed the lower river to provide navigation to move products up and down the river. For decades, the flood control and navigation system brought great economic benefits to the Missouri River Basin. These two primary purposes also allowed for other benefits to develop such as water supply, hydropower, irrigation, water quality control, and recreation, which includes fish and wildlife.

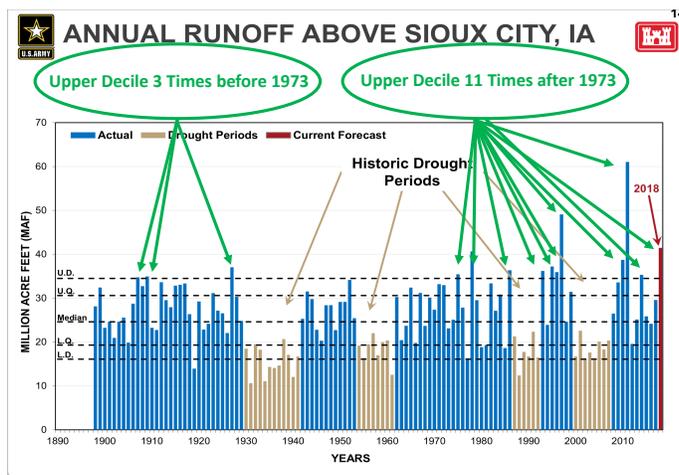
In 1973, things began to change. With the passage of the Endangered Species Act the Corps of Engineers began changing structures in the river, which were designed to provide for a 300' wide and 9' deep channel. The Corps began notching dikes, revetments and other structures designed to control the flow of the river and provide flood control and navigation in the lower river. The notching continues

today, 46 years later. Other changes have taken place over the years. Drought periods impacted the recreation industry in the upper basin and upper basin states began to push for changes in the way reservoir levels were managed. This kicked off a period of great contention between upper and lower basin states.

As calls for changes in the Missouri River Master Water Control Manual, were made by upper basin states, some environmental groups saw an opportunity to take-over the management of the River. They pressed the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to get involved. Three threatened and endangered species were identified and the power of the endangered species act would soon cause a dramatic shift in the way the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers operated the system. Instead of using the highly engineered system for flood control and navigation as originally designed, the Corps of Engineers found itself dismantling the system piece by piece through increased dike notching and conducting experiments for the Fish and Wildlife Service. These experiments are designed to “connect the river to the floodplain” or in more understandable terms “designed to cause flooding along the Missouri River”!

Failed experiment after failed experiment over the past 20-plus years has substantially changed the previously highly engineered river. Structures which once provided a stable channel have been weakened, and in some cases removed. Side channels and chutes have been opened to allow the River to flow uncontrolled and cause erosion and scouring. Flood control has been diminished and riverboat pilots find it hard to navigate the channel, which has become dangerous at many locations. A system once used to provide flood control is now being use as a super-sized science experiment for two birds and a fish. As a result, we are seeing greater floods more often, human lives have been lost and people are enduring great suffering. All the while, no scientific evidence can be found to show any of the changes have even helped the fish and two birds!

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has spent over 2/3 of a Billion Dollars making changes to the River since 2005, in the name of Missouri River Fish and Wildlife Recovery. Meanwhile, we continue to see more water entering the River at higher velocities. Note the Graph below from the Corps of Engineers:



Prior to 1973, the runoff above Sioux City reached the upper decile level only three time, while since 1973, runoff has been in the upper decile 11 times. Clearly, more water is coming into the system, more often.

Changes must be made! The flood of 2019, can more accurately be describe as the flood of 1973 through 2019. Dike notching began in 1973, the first of many changes to the original river design. In 2004, congress approved changes to the Missouri River Master Water Control Manual which no longer held flood control as the primary purpose for the flood control system. Instead, the Corps is forced to try to balance all the purposes of the system to the detriment of their ability to provide flood protection.

When one uses something in a way it was not designed to be used it often fails. When hooking a tractor to a plow too large for the tractor, the tractor may pull it for a short time, but eventually the tractor will give out and likely ruin the engine. Trying to put a gallon of water into a quart jar only causes a mess on the table top. Likewise, using the flood control system for science experiments is failing and making a mess of the Missouri River Basin.

Many want to blame the Corps of Engineers for the recent flooding and floods of the past. After all, the Corps operates the flood control system. Right? While it is true the Corps operates the system, we will do well to remember the Corps of Engineers is the United States Army Corps of Engineers. These solid engineers follow orders and those who follow orders best rise to the top of the Corps. Colonels do what Generals order them to do and Generals do what the Generals above them order them to do. We must understand where the orders to conduct science experiments with the Missouri River flood control system came from.

Ultimately, the Corps of Engineers' orders come from Congress. Congress needs to change the orders! Pressure from well-funded environmental groups, over the years, has caused Congress to blindly make changes in the way the Missouri River system is operated and removed flood control as the system's top priority.

Flood Control MUST be the top priority for the operation of the Missouri River flood control system. Flood control was the original purpose for building the system back in 1944. Flood control is even more necessary today than it was in 1944. Inflows into the system are greater and the system has not been improved to meet the challenges of higher flows and greater velocities. The system has been modified to reduce flood control rather than improve flood control. The tipping point has been reached and people have suffered enough!

By making flood control again the top priority for the management of the system, infrastructure improvements can be made and flooding can be reduced--even eliminated. We cannot build an umbrella over the coastlines to protect people from hurricanes and we cannot bolt together the fault lines to protect people from earthquakes, but we can build flood control infrastructure to protect people and property from flooding. They do it in Holland and China, and we can do it here in the United States. The key is for Congress to make flood control the priority.

Making flood control the top priority for management of the Missouri River should be easy for Congress to do. Following flood after flood along the Missouri River congress has spent millions upon millions of dollars for recovery. Congress needs to spend money up front to prevent the damages in the first place. Improving infrastructure now can reduce or eliminate the expense of recovery later.

Some will say let's just move everyone and everything out of the floodplain and allow the river to run wild. These uneducated scholars do not understand the economic value of the farmland found in the nation's bottomlands. In Missouri alone, over one third of the crop production is located in the fertile river valleys. The highly productive soil found adjacent to the nation's rivers makes our country strong. A hundred thousand acres of river bottomland can produce enough calories to feed over 1 Million people for an entire year. What a waste it would be to allow rivers to run wild and destroy such a valuable part of our nation's strength.

Food production makes the United States strong. When we want to put pressure on other countries, we use food to encourage them to do the right thing. When we want to help other countries, we send them food. Food is the strength and leverage we have many other countries only wish they had. Protecting our food production in turn protects all Americans. Sure, the United States has the strongest military in the world, but as a peaceful nation, food is the most powerful tool we can use before turning to the use of bullets.

Following the 1993, and 2011, floods on the Missouri River, the greatest recovery expenses were related to agriculture. It only makes sense to protect the rich farmland along the River. To do this, flood control must be the top priority and the ludicrous practice of “connecting the river to the floodplain” must stop. Levees and other flood control infrastructure must be improved and the system must be managed to provide the protection it was designed to provide.

It took a long time to tear down the once highly designed system and it will take time to bring it back to the level of protection it once provided. But with Congress designating flood control as the top priority, these changes can begin. At the same time, fish and birds can survive, a safe water supply can continue, barges can ply the river and the other uses can flourish. Making flood control the top priority does not mean an end to all other uses and purposes for the River. It simply means the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will use the system as originally designed to protect human lives and property.

Meanwhile, the flooding for this year is likely not over. The system is primed for more flooding and the Missouri River could reach even higher levels at some locations than we saw earlier this year. A second storm in the plains of the upper basin dumped more rain and snow, all of which must eventually move through the system. The Corps of Engineers will have to increase releases to move water from the upper basin reservoirs. In addition, The Corps will need to begin making releases from reservoirs in Kansas which have been holding water back to aid with flooding downstream of Kansas City. The combination of releases from Kansas and the Upper Basin will keep the river high through the spring and summer. Heavy rains anywhere along the river will likely cause additional flooding this year. With over 100 levees already breached and communities and property left unprotected, the combination of reservoir releases and heavy rainfall this spring or summer could bring even more heartache and devastation to the Missouri River Basin. This, as recovery begins and the people along the Missouri River seek help to put their lives and livelihoods back together.

The Congressional Delegations in the Midwest cannot do it by themselves. It will take the entire Congress to understand and fix the problem. The decline of our flood control infrastructure is not limited to the Missouri River. Flooding occurs nearly every day somewhere in the United States. In his testimony during a recent U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works field hearing, Major General Scott A. Spellmon, Deputy Commanding General for Civil and Emergency Operations, United States Army Corps of Engineers, opened his remarks with a brief review of the many places across the country impacted by flooding this year. He said, “At one point, over 300 river gauges indicated a flood stage somewhere in the Nation, and there were over 183 reported ice jams on rivers across the northern portion of the country.” He went on to describe flooding occurring in Ohio, the Vicksburg Corps District, the Corps’ Memphis District, North Dakota, Colorado, California, Oregon and of course along much of the Missouri River. The long list of flooding locations serves to remind us the lack of attention to flood control infrastructure over the past several years is a national problem, which impacts nearly every corner of the country.

The lack of emphasis on flood control over the past 20-plus years and the current inadequate infrastructure must be addressed as a national priority. Congress must act together to correct the problem. Floods do not discriminate. They do not choose democrats over republicans or vice versa. Floods don’t choose rich over poor, north over south or east over west. Flood Control is not a partisan issue. It is an issue impacting the entire country and as such, the entire Congress should support prioritizing flood control first. Without flood control, nothing else matters.

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