

# MISSISSIPPI RIVER COMMISSION

VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI

August 14, 2008

MISSISSIPPI RIVER COMMISSION  
P.O. BOX 80  
VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI 39181-0080

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## RECOMMENDATION OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER COMMISSION ON THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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Lake Village, Arkansas

Honorable R. D. James  
*Civilian/Civil Engineer*  
New Madrid, Missouri

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*Civilian/Civil Engineer*  
Houma, Louisiana

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With the authorization of the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program in WRDA 2007, the Upper Mississippi River Basin has two of the three major components - navigation improvements and environmental sustainability - of a holistic system-wide plan to address the multiple needs of the world's third largest watershed. Two major floods in the last 15 years causing billions in economic damage and heart-breaking devastation to the region's people compel the Mississippi River Commission to call for action in the upper Mississippi River watershed. A comprehensive plan for flood damage reduction on the Upper Mississippi must now join the ongoing navigation improvements and environmental restoration efforts needed to maximize long-term and sustainable benefits of "America's River."

In support of building such a complete plan for the basin, the Mississippi River Commission recommends implementing the comprehensive approach to flood damage reduction described in Plan H of the Upper Mississippi River Comprehensive Plan (UMRCP), modified such that there will be no induced increases in the water surface levels on the Mississippi River below Thebes, Illinois. The Governors and overwhelming number of stakeholders of Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri strongly support such a comprehensive approach.

Since 1879, the seven-member Presidentially appointed Mississippi River Commission has developed and matured plans for the general improvement of the Mississippi River from the Head of Passes to the Headwaters. The Mississippi River Commission brings critical engineering representation to the drainage basin, which impacts 41% of the United States and includes 1.25 million square miles, over 250 tributaries, 31 states, and 2 Canadian provinces.

*Listening, Inspecting, Partnering and Engineering since 1879*

While this Commission acknowledges that the reconnaissance level analysis of the UMRCP indicates that there is no Federal interest based on current evaluation criteria, we believe that the full benefits of implementing Plan H cannot be adequately measured with current Corps of Engineer planning guidelines. The people that live along the Mississippi River are sustained by it, and they in turn provide for the nation by working the land, sustaining the environment, and using this magnificent waterway that meanders through the most productive land in the United States to power the economic engine of mid-America.

As the National Water Policy Act of 1934 recognized, water resource engineering does not exist for its own sake. It is of little use to engineer solutions or develop grand plans if we cannot improve the quality of life and sustain the environment upon which that quality depends. For the past 80 years, the Mississippi River Commission and the Corps of Engineers, in conjunction with hundreds of state, local, and private entities, have learned to manage the lower Mississippi for the betterment of millions of Americans living south of Cairo, Illinois. It is time to extend the same commitment to flood damage reduction enjoyed by citizens of the lower Mississippi Valley and to those living in the upper basin as well.

At this time and with current scientific and engineering tools, a significant knowledge deficit prevents us from knowing everything about the upper basin and how best to manage its many facets, but we recommend that the process begin. The 1927 Chief of Engineers' Plan for Flood Control of the Mississippi River in the Alluvial Valley, contained in House Document 90, 70<sup>th</sup> Congress, did not provide all of the details that ultimately resulted in a comprehensive approach for flood damage reduction on the lower Mississippi River either. It took many years of listening, inspecting, partnering, and engineering by the Mississippi River Commission with partners and elected officials to develop the comprehensive Mississippi River and Tributaries project. That project continues to be improved today through that same iterative process.

We acknowledge that a comprehensive plan for the upper Mississippi River system must do more than build levees - it must be a collaborative effort by states and landowners to decide the best use of land and flood control structures in the higher

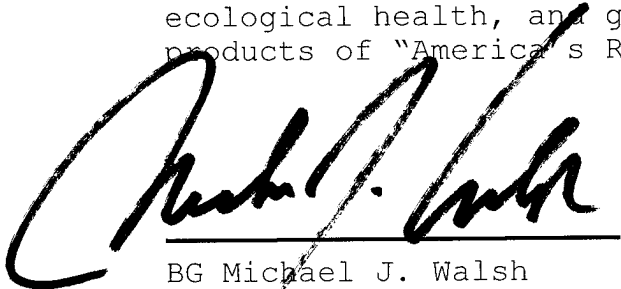
benefit-to-cost ratio area. Given that by some experts' analysis, areas of this region have suffered a 500-year level flood twice in 15 years, this commission believes these events provide a compelling reason to develop a flood damage reduction system that provides a "500-year level of protection" and other cost-effective considerations. This flood damage reduction plan must be nested with the navigation and environmental restoration plans already authorized to create a sustainable, effective, and comprehensive solution on the Upper Mississippi.

In addition to recommending that Plan H of the UMRCP be implemented, the Commission recommends the following actions also be undertaken to help resolve shorter term, but critical challenges in the basin:

- Placement of additional and more durable river gages on the Mississippi River and tributaries to better forecast events and to inform the public of potential flood risks.
- Expand the "main stem" watershed analysis of the UMRCP to include the tributaries of the Mississippi River, in order to create a true basin-wide analysis.
- Begin a feasibility study to address the reconstruction needs of the aging infrastructure to ensure that the systems provide their intended benefits into the future.
- Begin a feasibility study of critical transportation needs to ensure that approaches to bridges that cross the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers remain accessible during major flood events.

This plan must be implemented by a single entity with oversight spanning the entire watershed. The Mississippi River Commission has legislative authority and proven experience to provide leadership to objectively and fairly consider impacts along the entire length of this great river. The entire watershed and impacts on it must be identified and considered as improvements are made. Since 1879, the Mississippi River Commission has had the authority to develop and mature plans from the Head of Passes to the Headwaters, and should provide the Congress and American people oversight on implementing this project.

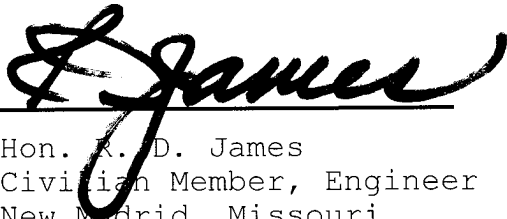
We cannot solve all or even most problems immediately, but pursuing Plan H as modified to eliminate adverse impacts on the Lower Mississippi would provide a long overdue framework for a significant portion of the Upper Mississippi River Valley. It is time to act to bring about the full Mississippi River basin plan that will, in decades to come, ensure the economic vitality, ecological health, and global competitiveness of the people and products of "America's River."



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Lake Village, Arkansas



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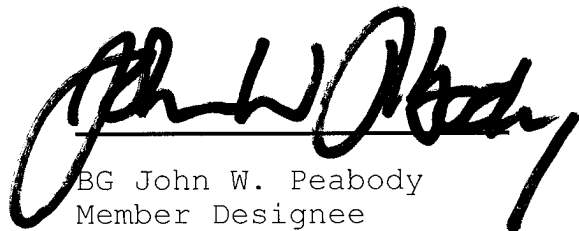


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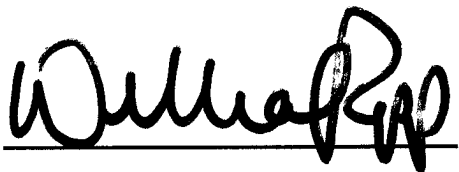
[NOT PRESENT]

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