



# The Mississippi River is a Valuable Natural and Cultural Resource

Winding through the nation's heartland, the Mississippi River has shaped our history and our culture and played a vital role in the lives and livelihoods of millions of people. The river's many different names – the Father of Waters, Big Muddy, Old Devil River – bear witness to the diversity of the people who have lived along its shores, from the Mille Lacs at the river's source to the Cajuns at the river's mouth.

As long as people have lived along the river's banks, the Mississippi has been an artery for trade and commerce, and it easily wins the title of America's hardest working river. The river serves as both a source of power and drinking water. Farmers annually harvest more than 2 billion bushels of corn and soybeans from the river's fertile floodplain.

The Mississippi also serves as a permanent home for hundreds of species of wildlife, including rare fish that swam among the dinosaurs, but have been driven to the verge of extinction in less than a century. More than 300 varieties of birds use the river and its floodplain, and 260 fish species swim in the river's waters. The river serves as a critical refuge for a multitude of wild visitors, including 40 percent of North America's waterfowl and hundreds of bald eagles.

The river's natural and cultural resources are powerful economic engines:

- Millions of people visit the river every year, spending \$20 billion and supporting more than 300,000 jobs. This is two times the revenue and ten times the jobs generated by shipping. Each year, tourism increases by at least 3 percent.
- More than 12 million people annually recreate on and along the Upper Mississippi River, spending \$1.2 billion and supporting 18,000 jobs. More people use the Upper Mississippi than visit Yellowstone National Park.
- More than 15,000 people continue to harvest the river's natural bounty to earn their livelihood, including commercial fishermen, trappers, and Native Americans who harvest wild rice along the river's banks.

Converting the Mississippi into a waterway choked by dams and lined with levees has destroyed millions of acres of wetlands, side channels and other wildlife habitats. As a result, some species have gone extinct and many more are declining. Unless we protect and restore the river's natural resources, more species will vanish and thousands of jobs that depend upon the health of the river will be lost. Congress should accelerate efforts to restore the river's lost wildlife habitat.

American Rivers

Environmental Defense

Illinois Stewardship Alliance

Izaak Walton League of America

Mississippi River Basin Alliance

National Audubon Society

National Wildlife Federation

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# The Corps' Forecasts Are Overly Optimistic

To support construction of seven new locks and the extension of five existing locks, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) forecasts that traffic on the Upper Mississippi River will grow dramatically in the next few decades.

In fact, river traffic has been flat since 1980 and has actually declined in recent years. In 2003, river traffic reached the lowest level in five years.

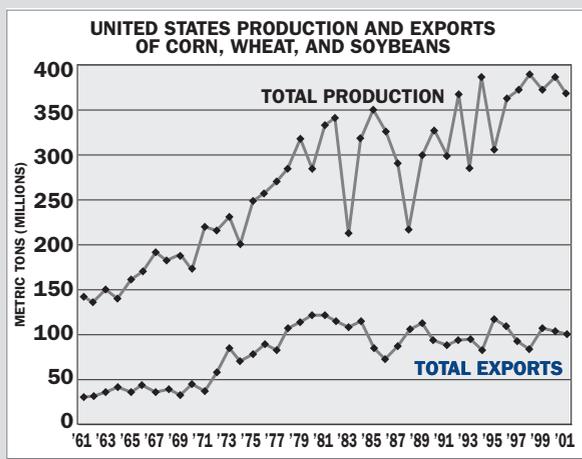
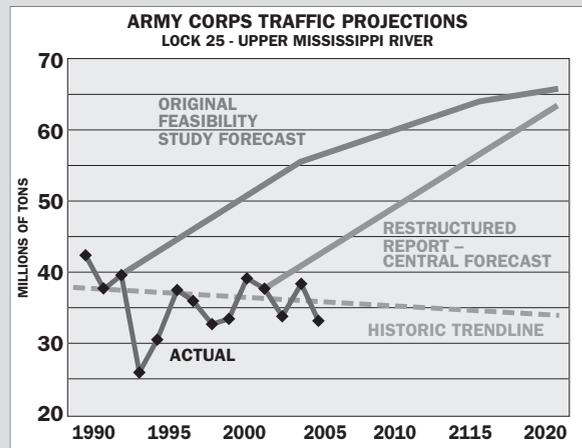
The Corps' traffic forecasts have been wrong before. Nationally, only two of 14 waterway projects constructed since World War II have attracted as much commercial traffic as the Corps predicted. As recently as 1997, the Corps predicted that 49 million tons of cargo would pass through Lock and Dam 25 near Saint Louis by 2001. But, only 35 million tons actually moved through the lock that year.

Traffic forecasts used to justify the last lock expansion project on the Mississippi were also wrong. In 1982, the Corps predicted that 123 million tons of commercial traffic would pass through Lock and Dam 26 by 1998. In fact, only 73 million tons passed through the expanded lock – or just 60 percent of the Corps' prediction. Unfortunately, the new traffic "scenarios" the Corps is using to support a \$2.3 billion lock expansion project are just as grossly exaggerated as the old forecasts.

Why are the Corps' traffic forecasts overly optimistic? One reason is that the Corps ignores the growth of ethanol plants, feedlots and other processing facilities that use grain and oilseeds to make finished products. The majority of these commodities are used or processed domestically, creating jobs in rural communities, and do not rely on barge transportation. Instead, the Corps assumes that most of the grain and oilseed grown by farmers is shipped down the river.

## Demand the Use of Accurate Data

Hundreds of our communities rely on a healthy Mississippi River for their well-being. The Corps must employ credible economic tools to determine whether more large scale construction that will further harm the river is justified.



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- Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
- Izaak Walton League of America
- Mississippi River Basin Alliance
- National Wildlife Federation
- Sierra Club
- Taxpayers for Common Sense

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# Relieve Waterway Congestion Now

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) has proposed to spend \$2.3 billion to build seven new locks and extend the length of five other locks on the Upper Mississippi and Illinois rivers.

But studies by the Corps and independent experts show that less costly measures could significantly reduce delays at existing Mississippi River locks. Traffic scheduling, helper boats, and other inexpensive congestion management measures could reduce a 90-minute lockage by 20 minutes or more. Similar measures have been used to eliminate bottlenecks on highways, railroads, and airports.

New technologies such as global positioning systems have been readily adopted by private industry to increase the efficiency of their transportation systems. The Corps, unfortunately, is not run like a private business and tends to favor large infrastructure projects over less costly efficiency measures with proven results.

## Simple Improvements Will Have Positive Results

- Deploying helper boats at some locks to help tow operators could reduce a 90-minute lockage by up to 20 minutes. Helper boats would cost less than \$100 million to deploy, and cost less than \$50 million annually to operate. That's less than the cost of one new lock.
- Scheduling the arrival of barges at locks could significantly reduce delays. Scheduling has been used successfully on the Panama Canal and other waterways. In addition to reducing delays, scheduling helps cut fuel costs and other related expenses.
- Proper training and equipment allows tow operators to move through locks as much as 30 minutes faster than their competitors, as revealed by the Corps' own data. Incentive systems could be created to reward operators who use locks quickly -- and to penalize those operators who use locks slowly.

## We Need Solutions Now

Unlike longer locks – which would not be completed for decades – congestion management measures like traffic scheduling and helper boats could be implemented right away at a fraction of the cost. Unfortunately, the Corps still insists on going forward with lock expansion – even though the National Academy of Sciences has twice urged the Corps to implement less expensive traffic management options before building longer locks. The National Academy found that it was not possible to evaluate the need for longer locks until the current infrastructure was utilized more efficiently.

Congress should demand that the Corps implement inexpensive congestion management measures while the agency properly evaluates the need for longer locks.

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# Restore and Revitalize the Mississippi River

As it flows from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi River winds through hundreds of communities that depend upon a healthy river for jobs, drinking water, and recreation. Tourism in counties along the river generates more than \$20 billion each year, supporting more than 300,000 jobs.

The Mississippi and its floodplain serve as a permanent home for hundreds of species of wildlife, including rare fish that swam among the dinosaurs but have been driven to the verge of extinction in less than a century. More than 300 varieties of birds use the river and its floodplain, and 260 fish species swim in the river's waters. The river serves as a critical refuge for a multitude of wild visitors, including 40 percent of North America's waterfowl and hundreds of bald eagles.

## Dams and Levees Have Damaged the River

Millions of acres of wetlands, and countless side channels, sandbars, and islands have been destroyed by the conversion of the Mississippi River into a commercial waterway straight-jacketed by levees. More than half of the river's floodplain has been cut off by levees, blocking access to floodplain spawning grounds and encouraging the conversion of forest and meadow for urban and agricultural uses. Every year, more than 20 square miles of coastal wetlands are lost because a wall of flood control levees now funnels sediment into the Gulf of Mexico instead of the coastal delta where wetlands would be renourished and protected. Dam operations designed solely to aid barge traffic are undermining the growth of marsh plants that anchor the river's food chain. Pollution from farms and factories adds to the river's woes, and is causing an 8,000-square-mile "dead zone" at the end of the river's journey in the Gulf of Mexico.

As critical wildlife habitats have been lost, many species have gone extinct, many are threatened with extinction, and many more are declining. Riverside communities that depend upon a healthy river are struggling to attract and retain businesses.

## Support Real Restoration Now

In 2004, Congress will decide whether to restore the river or accelerate the river's decline. Congress should:

- Fully fund a long-term and comprehensive plan for restoration.
- Buy floodplain land from willing sellers and restore lost wetlands, meadows and forests.
- Reform dam operations to trigger the growth of marsh plants wildlife need to survive.
- Retrofit old water projects to create new side channels and islands.
- Implement congestion management measures like traffic scheduling to reduce lock congestion.

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