



Obama Administration Should Stop Damaging, Dated Levee Project

Corps Just Released Seventh Study of 1950s-era Project That Would Harm Wildlife, Increase Flooding and Waste Money

July 19, 2013 – Today, conservation groups called on the Obama Administration to put a stop to the Corps' 60-year-old plan to levee off the New Madrid Floodway, a critical flood relief valve in Missouri. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) [has released its seventh environmental study](#) in an effort to resurrect this proposal, which dates back to 1954.

The levee would sever the Mississippi River's last connection with its floodplain in Missouri, increasing the potential for flooding in a dozen communities and harming fish and wildlife throughout the central portion of the Mississippi River. Conservation groups responded to the Corps' proposal:

George Sorvalis, Water Campaign Manager, [National Wildlife Federation](#), (202) 797-6617, sorvalisg@nwf.org:

"There is no reason to spend millions of taxpayer dollars to prevent a floodway from flooding. This project would sever the last remaining connection the Mississippi River has to its floodplain in Missouri, devastating fish and wildlife populations. The Obama Administration needs to put this boondoggle to rest once and for all."

Brad Walker, [Missouri Coalition for the Environment](#), (314) 727-0600, walker@moenviron.org

"This folly of a project has never been built for one simple reason: it is a subsidy for a handful of wealthy farmers that is not in the best interest of the American people."

Bruce Morrison, General Counsel, [Great Rivers Environmental Law Center](#), (314) 397-2474, bamorrison@greatriverslaw.org

"Why should taxpayers build a levee that may need to have a hole blown in it every time the floodway needs to be operated? In terms of the misuse of the public's money, as well as damage to Missouri's environment, this is the most absurd Corps project we have seen in quite some time."

Glynnis Collins, Executive Director, [Prairie Rivers Network](http://prairierivers.org), (217) 344-2371, csmith@prairierivers.org

“The New Madrid Levee would increase the risk of flooding for communities, destroy thousands of acres of wetlands and devastate fish and wildlife populations. The Corps' persistence in trying to move this project forward highlights the need for a serious overhaul of the agency's planning process.”

Tim Joice, [Kentucky Waterways Alliance](http://kwalliance.org), (502) 589-8008, tim@kwalliance.org

“This project will increase flooding risks for Kentucky towns along the Mississippi and Lower Ohio, and will result in the loss of thousands of acres of critical backwater flooding habitat and wetlands. The continued effort by the Corps to move forward this wasteful and useless project illustrates a need for reform of the Agency's mission and process.”

Project Background:

- The sixty-foot high, quarter-mile long levee would block the Mississippi River from entering natural backwater areas in the New Madrid Floodway. This is the last remaining area in Missouri where the Mississippi River connects to its floodplain. This floodway filters pollution, stores floodwaters, and is **important habitat for waterfowl and for fish populations** in this part of Mississippi River.
- In the spring of 2011, the state of Missouri sued to stop use of the floodway during the record-breaking flooding along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. Once the Corps was allowed to divert flood waters into the floodway, river levels dropped quickly. Delay in the floodway’s operation has been implicated in the catastrophic flooding of Olive Branch, IL. Further economic development in the area will only make it more difficult to operate the floodway to protect communities.

What Has Been Said About the New Madrid Levee

- A recent *Washington Post* editorial described the New Madrid levee as “[a bizarre waste of taxpayer money and an ecological disaster that a few members of Congress refuse to drop.](#)”
- In January of this year, the Fish and Wildlife Service’s preliminary review of the Corps’ draft study stated that construction of the project would result in “[unacceptable losses of nationally significant fish, wildlife, and aquatic resources.](#)”
- In 2011, the Department of Interior stated, “[the Department does not believe it is in the public interest to engage in continued environmental analysis of this project.](#)”
- In 2007, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia found that the Corps had “[resorted to arbitrary and capricious reasoning - manipulating models and changing definitions where necessary – to make this project seem compliant with the Clean Water Act and the National Environmental Policy Act when it is not.](#)”
- In 2002, the Chief of the Legislative Management Branch of the Corps called the New Madrid Levee and another project “[economic duds with huge environmental consequences.](#)”

For more information, visit www.nwf.org/newmadrid.

The [National Wildlife Federation](#) is America's largest conservation organization inspiring Americans to protect wildlife for our children's future.

The [Missouri Coalition for the Environment](#) is Missouri's independent, citizens environmental organization for clean water, clean air, clean energy, and a healthy environment.

The [Great Rivers Environmental Law Center](#) is a non-profit, public interest environmental law firm in St. Louis that provides legal services to those seeking to protect the environment.

The [Prairie Rivers Network](#) is Illinois' only statewide river protection nonprofit, dedicated to protecting Illinois rivers for people, fish and wildlife.

The [Kentucky Waterways Alliance](#) is dedicated to strengthening community and governmental stewardship for the restoration and preservation of Kentucky's streams, lakes, rivers, and wetlands.

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