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Congressional Letter Opposes Missouri River Master Manual Revisions

ST. LOUIS – A multi-state, bipartisan Congressional delegation letter opposing revisions to the Missouri River Master Manual says that if finalized, the plan could have “significant negative impacts on landowners and stakeholders throughout the entire Missouri River basin.”

The letter, coordinated by Senator Roy Blunt (R- MO) and Congressman Blaine Luetkemeyer (R-MO 3rd Dist.) and joined by Missouri River Basin delegates from Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota and Missouri, was sent to the Honorable Jo-Ellen Darcy, Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works), on December 18, 2015.

The letter expresses concerns with current proposed alternatives for the Missouri River Recovery Program Management Plan (Management Plan), stating that the alternatives could require a revision of the Missouri River Main stem Reservoir System Master Water Control Manual (Master Manual).

The letter is being applauded by the American Waterways Operators (AWO) and the Coalition to Protect the Missouri River (CPR). Many Missouri River Basin states and stakeholders believe it is not in their best interest for the Master Manual to be revised in any manner. AWO and CPR note that it is rare to have the bipartisan agreement of the Upper and Lower Basin states on such issues.

Lynn Muench, AWO Senior Vice President – Regional Advocacy and CPR Board Chair stated, “AWO and CPR thank the Missouri River Basin’s senators and representatives for their continued efforts to protect the quality of life for the citizens of the basin. River operations through the current Master Manual provide for flood protection, Missouri and Mississippi River navigation flows plus recreation, thermal power and drinking water needs.”

According to the letter, “The proposed alternatives call for significant changes to the operation of the mainstem reservoir system including alterations to the spring pulse, addition of a fall pulse, and addition of a low summer flow. These actions could threaten water supply for municipal use and agricultural irrigation, create difficulties for controlling flood risks, eliminate the navigation season, and reduce recreational opportunities. In short, revising the Master Manual to adhere exclusively to a single purpose would be to the detriment of the other authorized purposes.”

The letter further states, “While we understand the desire to consider a comprehensive set of alternatives, such alternatives should be guided by the best available science, should seek to minimize risks to stakeholders, and should be constrained by the guidelines set out in the current Master Manual.

“Due to our concerns regarding the current process, we strongly urge the Corps [of Engineers] and [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service] to only pursue a management plan that would not necessitate a revision of the Master Manual or incur damaging impacts to stakeholders and landowners.”

Four of the latest six proposed alternatives in the Management Plan would require Master Manual revisions to implement recovery actions for the threatened interior least tern and piping plover and the endangered pallid sturgeon.

The Management Plan alternatives under consideration are of such a magnitude that both Upper and Lower Basin stakeholders are concerned with the potential adverse impacts that could occur particularly to flood control, navigation, recreation and agriculture.

The letter with its signatories and in its entirety can be downloaded at <http://ow.ly/Wcbpq>.

About the American Waterways Operators

The American Waterways Operators is the national trade association representing the tugboat, towboat and barge industry, which operates on the rivers, the Great Lakes, and along the coasts and in the harbors of the United States. Barge transportation serves the nation as the safest, most environmentally friendly and most economical mode of freight transportation. For more information about AWO, please visit www.americanwaterways.com.