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BG Peter D. Helmlinger
Commander, Northwestern Division
U.S Army Corps of Engineers
CENWO-PMA-C
1616 Capitol Avenue
Omaha, NE 68102

RE: Draft Fort Peck Dam Test
Flow Release Environmental
Impact Statement

Dear General Helmlinger:

On behalf of The American Waterways Operators (AWO), the national trade association for the tugboat, towboat, and barge industry, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Corps' Draft Fort Peck Dam Test Flow Release Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

The U.S. tugboat, towboat, and barge industry is a vital segment of America's transportation system. The industry safely and efficiently moves over 760 million tons of cargo each year, including more than 60 percent of U.S. export grain, energy sources such as coal and petroleum, and other bulk commodities that are the building blocks of the U.S. economy. The fleet consists of nearly 5,500 tugboats and towboats, and over 31,000 barges. These vessels transit 25,000 miles of inland and intracoastal waterways; the Great Lakes; and the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coasts. Tugboats also provide essential services including ship docking, tanker escort and bunkering in ports and harbors around the country.

The tugboat, towboat and barge industry is not only an integral part of the U.S. intermodal transportation system, but also the safest, most affordable and most fuel-efficient transportation mode, with the smallest carbon footprint. Actions that adversely impact the efficiency of waterborne commerce, or that result in the diversion of cargo to other modes of transportation negatively impact the U.S. economy, public safety, and the environment.

AWO has represented navigation stakeholders on the Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee (MRRIC) since its inception in the fall of 2008. Authorized by Congress in Section 5018 of the 2007 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), MRRIC is composed of nearly 70 representatives of tribes, stakeholder groups, states, and federal agencies.

AWO makes the following comments and recommendations regarding the Corps' proposal to implement Alternative 1, the Preferred Alternative, as described in the DEIS to benefit the pallid sturgeon:

- 1) AWO urges the Corps to adopt the "system" approach with the lower Missouri and Mississippi rivers for pallid sturgeon recruitment and recovery. The Corps, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state agencies, and other groups encourage actions on the upper Missouri River to be viewed as a "system" in conjunction with the Yellowstone River. However, a "system" approach is not being incorporated when evaluating the Mississippi River's role in pallid sturgeon recruitment and recovery, which AWO has endorsed for years.
- 2) AWO is concerned that the DEIS calls for increased usage of the Fort Peck Dam spillway. Since spillways are only constructed to be utilized during extreme flood events, the Fort Peck spillway has only been used 4 or 5 times in its 80-year history. Activating the spillway more frequently than designed can cause erosion of the concrete wall underneath, leading to serious dam safety concerns. The Corps admits that Alternative 1 has the greatest potential to increase spillway risk. A Fort Peck Dam failure would have lasting impacts on the lower river basin and the primary authorized purposes of navigation and flood control. If the Corps proceeds with the test flow releases, then there must be funding to inspect the dam and spillway for damage and make all the necessary repairs before the following runoff season.
- 3) AWO remains concerned about the precedent Fort Peck test flow releases could set for future management actions on the Missouri River. If the test releases proposed under Alternative 1 are implemented, the Corps should assure stakeholders that this type of action will be limited to Fort Peck.
- 4) The DEIS clearly states that impacts to flow rates below Gavins Point Dam would be negligible. It is imperative that this remains the case if Alternative 1 is implemented. Dramatic increases to flow rates below Gavins Point Dam could impact navigation structures, imperiling safe navigation and flood control on the Missouri River.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Fort Peck Test Flow DEIS. We would be pleased to provide additional feedback or answer any questions as they arise.

Sincerely,

Justin Lampert

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