

Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative

Ensuring Vibrant Communities, Thriving Wildlife, and a Robust Economy



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The Mississippi River is a Vital Ecological, Economic, and Cultural Resource

The Mississippi River is a vital ecological, economic, and cultural resource that continuously serves the people of the United States and other nations. Yet, despite its critical importance, the River is in a severe state of decline that is not being stemmed by existing Federal programs. The Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative (MRRRI) would create the framework, focus, and critical coordination needed to reverse the decline of the vitally important Mississippi River.

The Mississippi River drives a vibrant natural resource and recreation-based economy that generates nearly \$500 billion in annual revenue, directly employs more than 1.5 million people, and supports a \$673 million shipping industry. The River provides more than 643 million gallons of water each day for domestic and industrial uses along its 133-county corridor, and supplies drinking water to more than 20 million people in 50 cities.

The Mississippi River supports more than 780 species of fish and wildlife, and provides a vital migration corridor for 60 percent of all North American birds and 40 percent of the nation's migratory waterfowl. Hundreds of miles of the River are adjacent to National Wildlife Refuges and other important habitat. The Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge which encompasses one of the largest blocks of floodplain habitat in the lower 48 states and is designated as a Wetland of International Importance and a Globally Important Bird Area. The 1.5 million acre Atchafalaya Swamp in Louisiana supports half of America's migratory waterfowl (more than 300 bird species) and 90% of wild crawfish sold in Louisiana. The River been designated by Congress as both a nationally significant ecosystem and navigation system.

A Severe State of Decline

Despite its critical value to the nation, the Mississippi River is in a severe state of decline that has resulted in more flooding, less wildlife, fewer jobs, reduced recreational opportunities, and higher costs for keeping communities safe and ensuring that they have clean drinking water. Fundamental changes to the River and its floodplain and coastal wetlands have dramatically reduced the River's ability to absorb floodwaters

and build coastal wetlands, leaving communities far more vulnerable to floods, hurricanes, and other storms. The extensive loss of wetlands and complex river habitat has caused profound harm to the nation's treasured fish and wildlife resources. Polluted runoff has drastically reduced water quality and created a massive dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico. Invasive aquatic species threaten the ecological integrity of the River and Gulf of Mexico, and the fisheries and recreation that rely on a healthy ecosystem. This damage has disproportionately harmed many communities of color, rural communities, and economically disadvantaged communities along the River. Existing Federal programs lack sufficient coordination, funding, and participation with States, Tribes, local governments, and non-governmental organizations to address these ongoing challenges and reverse the River's decline.

Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative

The Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative would create the framework and focus needed to reverse the decline of the vitally important Mississippi River. Under this Initiative, which is modeled on the highly successful [Great Lakes Restoration Initiative](#), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) would take the lead in developing and coordinating MRRRI and its implementing Action Plan in close coordination and consultation with other Federal agencies, States, Tribes, local governments and non-governmental organizations. MRRRI would strive to leverage existing Federal and State programs where appropriate, and would create important economic opportunities and well-paying jobs that by their very nature must remain local. MRRRI would work to:

- ✓ Improve water quality in the Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico by reducing the amount of polluted runoff, excess nutrients, and sediment entering the River system;
- ✓ Improve community resilience by restoring the ability of the Mississippi River and its floodplain, riverine wetlands, delta and coastal wetlands, and backwaters to minimize and ameliorate flood and storm risks;
- ✓ Protect and restore wildlife habitat in and along the Mississippi River and throughout the River corridor, including by preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species in the River system; and
- ✓ Prioritize these efforts to address disproportionate impacts to communities of color, rural communities, and economically disadvantaged communities caused by ecological degradation of the Mississippi River and its tributaries.

An associated MRRRI Action Plan would provide a comprehensive strategy to achieve these objectives and identify priority projects, activities, and research to implement that strategy. The MRRRI budget would deliver funding to projects and program activities in the mainstem Mississippi River States, including through grants to states and local governments. Funding would be directed to activities selected from the Action Plan in close cooperation with appropriate Federal agencies, States, Tribes, local governments, and non-governmental organizations. MRRRI and its Action Plans will be developed and updated on a regular basis with full public input.

The MRRRI would fill a clear gap in our nation's regional restoration initiatives, highlighting and reinforcing the Mississippi River as an ecosystem of national importance and providing the vision and resources to improve the health and resilience of the River system for communities, wildlife, and the economy.