

Testimony of the Izaak Walton League of America Subcommittee on Energy and Water

March 19, 2010

Submitted by Scott Kovarovics, Conservation Director

The Izaak Walton League of America appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning appropriations for fiscal year 2011 for programs under the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee. The League is a national, nonprofit organization founded in 1922. We have nearly 38,000 members and more than 260 local chapters nationwide. Our members are committed to advancing common sense policies that safeguard wildlife and habitat, support community-based conservation, and address pressing environmental issues. The following pertains to programs administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Corps of Engineers, Operations and Maintenance, Upper Mississippi River

The League is an active and long-time proponent of restoring the Upper Mississippi River (UMR) ecosystem. We have supported the Environmental Management Program (EMP) since its inception and continue to support this vital restoration program. We urge the Subcommittee to provide \$33.2 million for EMP as authorized by the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). Although we are encouraged by the president's request for FY 2011, pressing restoration needs on-the-ground require at least the full amount authorized for EMP.

The League has also strongly expressed its opinion that the large-scale navigation modifications included in the Recommended Plan for the Upper Mississippi Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP), as authorized by the Water Resources Development Act of 2007, have not been justified by the Corps and should not be pursued. Previous reviews from the National Academy of Sciences and the Assistant Secretary of the Army, Civil Works found that the navigation construction component of NESP was not economically justifiable. A report released last month by the Nicolett Island Coalition, of which the League is a member, provides additional evidence that proposed locks and dams in this region are not a good investment for American taxpayers. With this in mind, the League supports the administration's decision not to request funding for NESP in FY 2011.

The League has strong roots in the Upper Mississippi River region. Protecting the basin has been a key issue for our members since we led the fight to create the Upper Mississippi River Fish and Wildlife Refuge in 1924. The League has spearheaded efforts to reform the lock and dam navigation system to ensure that flows and habitat remain as natural as possible. We also work to promote sustainable agriculture practices and implement farm conservation programs to reduce polluted runoff. Our testimony reflects many decades of experience on the Upper Mississippi River and our direct 15-year involvement with the Upper Mississippi River – Illinois Waterway (UMR-IWW) navigation study.

The Upper Mississippi River is one of the most complex ecosystems on earth. It provides habitat for 50 species of mammals, 45 species of reptiles and amphibians, 37 species of mussels, and 241 species of fish. The need for ecosystem restoration is unquestionable. As the Corps correctly stated in its study of navigation expansion, this ecosystem is “significantly altered, is currently degraded, and is expected to get worse.” Researchers from the National Academy of Sciences have determined that river habitat is disappearing faster than it can be replaced through existing programs such as the Corps’ Environmental Management Program, which was authorized at \$33.2 million annually by Congress in 1999, but has never received full appropriations. As habitat vanishes, scientists warn that many species will decline and some will disappear.

Our nation relies on a healthy Mississippi River for commerce, recreation, drinking water, food supply and power. 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 recreate on the Upper Mississippi than visit Yellowstone National Park. Notably, barge traffic has remained static on the river for more than two decades with real declines in recent years.

In assembling the UMR-IWW navigation study, the Corps recognized the critical need for UMR ecosystem restoration work and encouraged Congress to invest approximately \$130 million annually in Upper Mississippi River habitat restoration efforts. With this demonstrated need in mind, the League strongly encourages the Subcommittee to prioritize investment in ecosystem restoration by appropriating at least \$33.2 million for the Environmental Management Program. Providing additional funding for restoration will provide near-term economic stimulus in communities along the UMR and long-term conservation and economic benefits for the region and the nation.

Corps of Engineers, Operations and Maintenance, Missouri River

The League joins the Missouri River Association of States and Tribes and other groups in urging the Subcommittee to appropriate \$119 million in FY 2011 for the Missouri River Recovery Program. This request represents the total value of restoration projects that the Corps of Engineers and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) could actively implement next fiscal year. With this funding, the Corps, FWS, states, and other partners could accelerate ecosystem restoration efforts that are already producing long-term ecological and economic benefits.

The Missouri River basin encompasses land in 10 states and covers one-sixth of the continental United States. The Missouri, America’s longest river, is one of the most altered ecosystems on earth. While recovery and restoration efforts have begun, much more needs to be done. League members, especially those in Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota, want to see the recovery efforts continue and expand.

The Corps, FWS, and many state agencies have been working on restoring habitat for fish and wildlife species along the river. This work is critical for the Interior Least Tern and

Pallid Sturgeon, which are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act, and the Piping Plover, which is listed as threatened. Moreover, the positive impacts of restoration extend to virtually all fish and wildlife throughout the region.

A study conducted by the Fish and Wildlife Service near Lisbon Bottoms in Missouri showed that over twice as many fish species were utilizing the created shallow water habitat (SWH) areas compared with the section of the river with a dredged channel. A Corps' study has shown that the emergent sandbar habitat (ESH) projects have had tremendous response from nesting terns and plovers. These habitat restoration projects are working with the river -- not against it.

These projects have also been a boon for recreation along portions of the river. Anglers, hunters, boaters and others have been using some of these areas proving the old adage "if you build it, they will come." Although the majority of the population lives in the lower basin, most recreational spending is currently occurring in the upper basin because facilities and opportunities are more abundant. These developed habitat projects are bringing people back to the river in the lower Missouri basin.

In addition to boosting the economy through tourism, restoration projects provide near-term economic stimulus in small communities throughout the region. These projects involve restoring and creating habitat for terns, plovers and pallid sturgeon in the middle and lower basin. To perform this work, the Corps contracts with local construction companies, which creates or maintains jobs and inject dollars into local economies through purchases of materials, fuel, food and lodging. With the additional funding we request, the Corps could readily implement some of these important restoration projects.

The League encourages the Subcommittee to provide \$119 million for recovery and restoration efforts along the Missouri River. Benchmarks have been set by the Biological Opinion establishing goals for habitat restoration. With adequate funding and a lot of hard work on the ground, we can meet these goals and restore critical segments of America's longest river.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony and look forward to working with the Subcommittee to strengthen the investment in ecosystem restoration and recovery along the Upper Mississippi and Missouri rivers.