

**Testimony of the Izaak Walton League of America  
Mike Leahy, Conservation Director**

**Before the  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development**

**Regarding Fiscal Year 2015 Appropriations**

**April 11, 2014**

The Izaak Walton League of America appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning appropriations for fiscal year (FY) 2015 for programs under the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee. The League is a national, nonprofit organization founded in 1922 with more than 44,000 members and nearly 250 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.

**Army Corps of Engineers, Operations and Maintenance, Missouri River  
The Missouri River Recovery Program**

The League respectfully urges the Subcommittee to appropriate more than the \$48.771 million in FY 2015, as requested by the Army Corps of Engineers, for the Missouri River Recovery Program (MRRP). The requested amount is not adequate funding for the critical needs of the MRRP. We ask that funding meet the Corps' capability level for the MRRP of \$70 million. Without sufficient funding, the Corps, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), states, and other partners cannot continue important ecosystem restoration efforts that are producing long-term ecological and economic benefits.

The Missouri River basin encompasses land in 10 states covering one-sixth of the continental United States. The Missouri River is one of the most altered ecosystems on earth. The recovery and restoration efforts need to continue and expand.

The Corps, FWS, and many state agencies have been restoring habitat for fish and wildlife along the river. This work is critical for the Interior Least Tern and Pallid Sturgeon, listed as endangered, and the Piping Plover, listed as threatened, under the Endangered Species Act. The restoration efforts also benefit many other species of fish and wildlife throughout the region. These habitat restoration projects work with the river - not against it.

These projects also generate additional economic activity in communities along the river. Anglers, hunters, boaters, birdwatchers, and others have been using these areas. The Missouri Department of Conservation and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission found recreational spending provides \$68 million in annual economic impact to communities along the Missouri River from Yankton, South Dakota to St. Louis, Missouri. A South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks study shows that recreational benefits from angling on the Missouri River account for over

\$107 million in annual economic activity in the Dakotas and Montana. These projects bring more people to the river throughout the Missouri basin.

In addition to the economic boost from tourism, restoration projects support job creation throughout the entire region. The Corps contracts with local construction companies, creating jobs and injecting dollars into local economies through purchases of materials, fuel, food and lodging. By increasing the amount of funding requested, the Corps could readily implement more of these important economic and river restoration projects.

### **Missouri River Ecosystem Restoration Plan:**

The League urges the Subcommittee not to include any provision in its FY 2015 bill that limits funding for the Missouri River Ecosystem Restoration Plan (MRERP). This long-term study will lead to a comprehensive plan that federal agencies, states, tribes, and communities along the river will be able to implement for a healthier Missouri River. A great deal of time and effort has already gone into development of MRERP. It must be funded to allow this important effort to get back on track before the information already gathered loses relevance and costs U.S. taxpayers more to gather again.

### **Missouri River Authorized Purposes Study:**

The League also urges the Subcommittee to provide funding to complete the Missouri River Authorized Purposes Study (MRAPS). The League strongly opposed the funding prohibition contained in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012. It does not provide taxpayers with meaningful savings in the near-term and jeopardizes real future savings. Delaying this analysis deprives the country of a Missouri River management program geared toward future needs rather than those identified during World War II.

MRAPS for the first time will review the eight authorized Missouri River purposes established by the Flood Control Act of 1944. This thorough analysis of the purposes will better determine how the river should be managed in the best interests the American taxpayer, all the residents of the basin, and fish and wildlife, taking into account today's economic values and priorities, than purposes identified nearly 70 years ago.

Full funding of MRAPS is a wise investment. A comprehensive review and accompanying changes will streamline future Corps operational expenses saving tax dollars and bringing Missouri River management into the 21st century. The League strongly believes that the MRAPS process must be allowed to resume in FY 2015.

### **Army Corps of Engineers, Construction, Upper Mississippi River**

The League is an active and long-time proponent of restoring the Upper Mississippi River (UMR) ecosystem. We have supported the Upper Mississippi River Restoration (subaccount for the Environmental Management Program) since its inception and continue to support this vital restoration initiative. We urge the Subcommittee to provide \$32 million for the UMRR-EMP as requested by the Corps of Engineers.

The League also reiterates our view 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 by 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 in 2010 by the Nicollet 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 Corps' decision not to request funding for NESP in FY 2015.

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 Upper Mississippi River Restoration program, which was authorized at \$33.2 million annually by Congress in 1999. 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, 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 annually than visit Yellowstone National Park. Each of the more than 50 completed restoration projects generates half of its labor from local workers living near the sites. During construction, each of these projects infuses an average of \$750,000 into the local economies and small towns. While the economic benefits from restoration and post-construction recreation become more important, barge traffic has been declining over the past decade.

In addition to funding habitat restoration on the Mississippi River, the Upper Mississippi River Restoration program funds valuable scientific research. This research is essential for understanding the Upper Mississippi River ecosystem and guiding the decisions of managers to minimize the impacts of the locks and dams on native fish and wildlife. When the program was established in 1986, Congress intended for one-third of the program funding to be dedicated for scientific research and long-term monitoring of ecosystem trends. But in FY 2014, the Administration broke that promise, allowing only \$5 million (about one-sixth of the total funding) to be spent on research and monitoring. As more funding for the program is made available, Congress should direct the Corps to continue to apportion one third of the funds for monitoring and assessment as required by law. In assembling the UMR-IWW navigation study, the Corps recognized the critical need for ecosystem restoration and encouraged Congress to invest approximately \$130 million annually in Upper Mississippi River habitat restoration efforts. With this need in mind, the League strongly encourages the Subcommittee to prioritize investment in ecosystem restoration by appropriating the full amount requested for the Upper Mississippi River Restoration – Environmental Management Program in fiscal year 2015. Additional funding for restoration will support economic development and job creation in communities along the UMR and provide long-term conservation and economic benefits for the region and the nation.

## **Clean Water Act Rulemaking**

The Izaak Walton League strongly supports the draft rule released by the Corps and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to clarify the Clean Water Act definition of "Waters of the U.S." We further urge the Subcommittee not to include or accept any provision in its FY 2015 bill barring the Army Corps and EPA from proceeding with this needed and overdue Clean Water Act rulemaking. Our organization and hunting, angling and conservation groups across the country actively opposed similar provisions in previous appropriations bills funding the Corps and EPA.

The draft rule is a great step toward restoring protections for upstream waters and wetlands that were eliminated or dramatically weakened over the last decade due to confusing Supreme Court rulings and agency guidance. The Corps and EPA are proposing a balanced, science-based rule to restore essential protections for streams, wetlands, and other waters. The proposal will better protect streams that provide drinking water to 117 million people and help conserve streams and wetlands that are vital to a vibrant outdoor recreation economy.

Since 2000, at least 20 million wetland acres and nearly 60 percent of stream miles in the continental United States have lost clearly defined protection from pollution and destruction. The draft clean water rule from the Corps and EPA would restore protections against polluting, draining, or filling for some of the waters and wetlands that lost such protections in the past decade. The draft rule includes exemptions for many land-use activities such as common farming and forestry practices and certain waters, including ornamental ponds.

The rule proposed by the Corps and EPA is based on sound science and clearly complies with the Supreme Court decisions in *SWANCC* and *Rapanos*. Allowing the agencies to proceed with rulemaking will partially restore protections for streams flowing to public drinking water supplies for 117 million Americans. It will also begin to restore protections for some wetlands. Healthy wetlands are essential to waterfowl, fish, and other wildlife, provide cost-effective flood protection, and improve water quality. They also support hunting, angling, and wildlife watching, which together inject \$145 billion annually into our economy. A final rule will also provide more clarity and certainty about Clean Water Act implementation to landowners, developers, agency personnel, and state and local governments.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony.