

FACT SHEET



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MANAGING THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER

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 Izaak Walton League has been a strong defender of these resources ever since we led the fight to create the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge in 1924. Today, our efforts focus on reforming the river's lock-and-dam navigation system and reducing polluted runoff from farms.

NAVIGATION

The Mississippi River has long been a major avenue for shipping and commerce. The government has built an elaborate system of locks and dams along the river to make navigation easier, but often at the expense of habitat. Unnatural flows have led to increased flooding, sedimentation, drainage of backwater areas, and other problems that are bad for both people and wildlife.

The League's Upper Mississippi River Initiative works with government agencies and regional conservation groups to increase habitat restoration along the river. In addition, we have been vocal opponents of lock-and-dam expansion that is not only economically unjustified but detrimental to wildlife. We also advocate in Congress for increased funding to protect and restore areas along the river that have been harmed by navigation expansion.

AGRICULTURE

Located in America's agricultural heartland, the Mississippi River receives a great deal of nitrogen, phosphorus, and chemicals from agricultural runoff. These pollutants eventually enter the Gulf of Mexico, where they contribute to the creation of a 14,000-square-mile dead zone, devoid of all life. The river also suffers from sedimentation and unnatural flooding, which are tied to farming practices that have historically encouraged farming of erosion-prone soils and draining of wetlands.

The League is working aggressively to improve farming practices in the watershed. Through improved federal and state policies, we are encouraging rotational grazing and next-generation energy crop production that can reduce negative impacts on the river, while at the same time being profitable for farmers. We are also working with agencies to step up enforcement of existing regulations, to make sure that bad farming practices aren't rewarded with government subsidies. In the future we will work to develop methods for tracking specific problems, such as manure spills or chemical runoff, so that offenders can be more readily identified and held accountable.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR AGRICULTURAL PROGRAM

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