

FACT SHEET



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MANAGING THE MISSOURI RIVER

As America's longest river (2,431 miles), the Missouri spans 10 states. Due to man-made changes of the river's natural flows for navigation, significant habitat for fish and wildlife—including a number of endangered and threatened species—is being degraded. Agricultural pollution is also a threat. The League is working with government agencies and other organizations on restoration and recovery of the river, protecting it for future generations.

NAVIGATION

Over the decades, the lower Missouri River's curves have been straightened, its backwater floodplain areas cut off, and its main channel lined with riprap. One reason for this reengineering of the river is to accommodate barge navigation. Unfortunately, channelization has destroyed a great deal of habitat along the river, pushing many species such as the piping plover, least tern, and pallid sturgeon into threatened and endangered status. Compounding the problem is bad flow management. Water is periodically released from the river's dams to support a small amount of barge navigation. These releases draw down water supplies upriver, threatening habitat and recreation opportunities upstream.

In 2007, League members in Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota joined to create the Missouri River Initiative. We are working with federal and state agencies and private groups to assess the environmental challenges facing the river, and to find commonsense solutions that work for both the region's ecology and economy. That includes restoring more natural flows, repairing backwater habitat along the river, and increasing opportunities for recreation.

AGRICULTURE

As the Missouri River has been altered, it has been separated from wetland areas. These wetlands historically filtered nitrogen, phosphorus, and chemicals from agricultural runoff before it reached the river. Without the river-wetland connection, more of these pollutants are now being flushed downstream, where they end up in the Mississippi River and contribute to the creation of a 14,000-square-mile dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

The League works at the local, state, and federal levels to improve farming practices and reduce the amount of pollutants entering the watershed. We teach farmers how to build riparian buffers along streams to soak up runoff. We are also working to strengthen federal farm policy so that it encourages farmers to retire marginal farmland, reducing erosion and preserving habitat. A key component of our approach has been the creation of a Sodsaver provision in the Farm Bill, which discourages the conversion of virgin prairie into cropland. Although this program is new and only available in portions of five Upper Missouri River states, the League is working to make sure it gets implemented as widely as possible.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR AGRICULTURAL PROGRAM

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