



April 13, 2023

Missouri River Basin Water Management Division
John Remus
Chief - Missouri River Basin Water Management
1616 Capitol Avenue, Suite 365
Omaha, NE 68102-4909

Dear Mr. Remus,

The Izaak Walton League of America thanks you for the opportunity to comment on Missouri River Water Management Plan and the operation of the reservoir system in 2023. The League has over 42,000 members in more than 200 chapters across the country. Our members enjoy spending time angling, hunting, boating, and camping on, and along, the Missouri River.

We thank you for providing the recording of the April 3rd Bismarck meeting after the blizzard prevented you from holding the South Dakota meetings in Fort Pierre and Lower Brule as scheduled.

The League respectfully requests your consideration of the following topics:

Recreational Access

Recreation on the Missouri River is a major economic driver for the basin and local, regional, and national economies. During the Bismarck meeting it was stated there could be recreational access issues on the upper reservoirs again this summer due to expected low runoff. Declining reservoir levels caused multiple access problems last year. We commend the Corps and upper basin's states for providing access at most locations. If reservoir pool levels decline again this year we urge the use of additional emergency funding to open, and maintain, temporary low-water sites and access roads when and where needed.

We urge the Corps to work with the upper basin states to promote the available access sites. Too often, perception is reality, people hear about closed ramps, and they think all ramps are closed. This negatively impacts visitor numbers and local economies. We encourage using traditional and social media to announce the number and location of the usable boat ramps throughout the year. Low reservoir levels magnify siltation issues at access sites. We request the Corps continue working with state agencies to remove accumulated silt at boat ramps to maintain easy access.

Fisheries

The 2023 management plan will strive to provide steady or rising levels in Fort Peck, Sakakawea, and Oahe during the forage and game fish spawn. Currently all three reservoirs are expected to rise but, if runoff is low, the 2023 management will favor Oahe and Fort Peck. We urge the Corps to do everything possible to maintain or raise pool levels on the three reservoirs this spring. Visitation and recreational spending are directly tied to angler success. Forage fish

are the glue that holds the fisheries together and are critical to angler satisfaction. We also support monitoring the quality of cold-water habitat in the reservoirs again this summer.

Flood Risk Reduction

This winter brought cooler and wetter weather over much of the basin. Mountain and plains snowpacks were above average. Areas of the plains had Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) up to 8 inches. Following a lengthy period of below average temperatures, a rapid warmup brought a quick snowmelt resulting in flooding on the Missouri River's tributaries and watersheds.

Flooding could occur in the lower river in the uncontrolled areas below the reservoir system. We ask the Corps to widely communicate that heavy rain can cause lower basin flooding with little or no notice. And the Corps' ability to reduce river stages diminishes the further downstream you are from the reservoir system.

Sedimentation

Accumulating sediment in the reservoirs is an on-going dilemma and an increasingly serious situation. The six reservoirs are facing sediment issues. The League urges the Corps' support of the completion of the Lewis and Clark Sediment Management Plan with the Missouri Sedimentation Action Coalition (MSAC). Phase 3 of the plan, scheduled for this year, will begin exploring alternatives to address the massive amounts of sediment in this popular reservoir.

This plan is particularly important as it will serve as the template for all six Missouri River reservoirs and for the 400 Corps water projects across the country. Sedimentation impacts all eight of the river's authorized purposes. With that, the League requests updated sediment information for the reservoirs in all future water management and annual operating plans.

Water Conservation Measures

It was stated during the Bismarck meeting that the Corps plans to continue water conservation measures. That means providing reduced support for the first half of the navigation season. If runoff is low the League supports the Corps only meeting flow targets in the reaches that have commercial traffic to save water for the other authorized purposes.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Fort Peck test releases, to benefit the endangered pallid sturgeon, will not be conducted in 2023 due to the low level of Fort Peck Lake. While the League supports recovery of the pallid in the upper and lower river, we agree with this decision given the low runoff we're experiencing. We commend the Corps for trying to minimize take on piping plovers below the dams and for limiting zero releases from Fort Randall Dam to lessen impacts on fish and wildlife.

Invasive Species

The League urges the Corps to increase public awareness of the serious threat posed by invasive plant and animal species to the Missouri River. Invasive zebra and quagga mussels cause severe impacts to recreation, hydropower, and domestic and irrigation water intakes.

We support the Corps future involvement with the upper basin states to increase watercraft inspection stations as proposed in the Programmatic Environmental Assessment that is currently out for review.

Cultural and Historic Sites

If reservoir pool levels are low it increases the chance of damage or destruction of valuable and important cultural and historic sites. We encourage the Corps to continue consultation with Tribes, and collaboration with the states, and other entities to protect these sites.

Summary

The League acknowledges water management on the Missouri River is challenging. We strongly recommend the Corps continue a high level of communication with states, Tribes, stakeholders, and local governments so the public is informed on management actions. The Izaak Walton League of America appreciates this opportunity to comment on the 2023 water management plan for the Missouri River Mainstem Reservoir System.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



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