

**Izaak Walton League of America * Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy *
National Wildlife Federation *
Prairie Rivers Network * Sierra Club**

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**Conservation and Policy Groups Call for a Halt on Construction of New Upper Mississippi River
Locks**

*Groups call on Congress to de-authorize new lock construction, fully fund Mississippi River
restoration and navigation system operation and maintenance*

St. Louis, MO – Conservation and policy groups released a report today criticizing an Army Corps of Engineers plan to build seven new navigational locks on the Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway. The groups conclude that the new locks would waste billions in taxpayer dollars while doing next to nothing to repair devastated fish and wildlife habitat along the river corridor.

“For more than 100 years, structures meant to enhance navigation have severely degraded the environment both within and around the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers,” says Christine Favilla, Three Rivers Project Coordinator for the Sierra Club. “Now is the time to ramp up the restoration efforts of this valuable resource, not give in to fiscal insanity.”

“We’re calling on Congress to pull the plug on the new locks and to stop holding river restoration hostage to unneeded navigation spending,” says Glynnis Collins, Executive Director of Prairie Rivers Network. “President Obama basically eliminated funding for the new locks in his Fiscal Year 2011 budget, as did President Bush before him. Congress needs to make that decision permanent in the next Water Resources Development Act,”

The Nicollet Island Coalition report, *Big Price – Little Benefit: Proposed Locks on the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers are Not Economically Viable*, takes a critical look at barge traffic delays and the real costs and benefits of a massive capital construction project planned by the Corps of Engineers.

“This project just doesn’t make sense. Barge traffic has decreased steadily for more than 20 years and the locks are sitting idle most of the time. Why would we spend \$2 billion to replace locks with that much extra capacity?” asks Brad Walker, Coordinator for the Izaak Walton League’s Upper Mississippi River Initiative.

“We can’t afford to subsidize any industry at the level being contemplated here, especially in these economic times,” agrees Mark Muller, Senior Fellow at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. “Performing proper maintenance to extend the life of the investment we’ve already made in the existing locks will provide good jobs and be much more cost effective for taxpayers.”

David Conrad, Senior Water Resources Specialist for the National Wildlife Federation, says, “With only 20 cents in benefits for every dollar in costs, this unsupportable project continues to sap Corps resources without addressing real transportation needs. It also is diverting attention and resources from the Corps’ congressionally-mandated charge to restore the Mississippi River ecosystem, while the rivers wildlife, natural functions, and public safety continue to deteriorate. These new locks should simply be taken off the books.”

The Nicollet Island Coalition report recommends that the new lock construction project be halted. It further recommends that ecosystem restoration funds and projects tied to the construction project be transferred to the Corps’ existing Upper Mississippi River Environmental Management Program. Read the full *Big Price – Little Benefit* report online at <http://iwla.org/bigprice>.

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The Nicollet Island Coalition is a group of conservation and environmental organizations formed in 1994 to address restoration issues on the Upper Mississippi River and provide coordinated advocacy work on Upper Mississippi River issues. Coalition partners include the Izaak Walton League of America (www.iwla.org), the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (www.iatp.org), National Wildlife Federation (www.nwf.org), Prairie Rivers Network (www.prairierivers.org), and Sierra Club (www.sierraclub.org).