

**American Bottom Conservancy • Arkansas Wildlife Federation • Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis • Biodiversity Project • Center for Neighborhood Technology • Citizens Against Widening the Industrial Canal • Committee on the Middle Fork Vermilion River • Delta Chapter Sierra Club • Delta Waterfowl Foundation • Friends of the Kaw/Kansas Riverkeeper • Friends of the North Fork and White Rivers • Great Rivers Environmental Law Center • Gulf Restoration Network • Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy • Iowa Chapter Sierra Club • Iowa Environmental Council • Iowa Rivers Revival • Jesus People Against Pollution • Kansas Natural Resource Council • Kansas Wildlife Federation • Kentucky Resources Council • Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation • Louisiana Bucket Brigade • Louisiana Environmental Action Network • Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper • Lower Mississippi River Foundation • Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development • Mid South Fly Fishers • Milwaukee Riverkeeper • Minnesota Conservation Federation • Minnesota Division of Izaak Walton League of America • Minnesota Ornithologists' Union • Mississippi Chapter of the Sierra Club • Mississippi River Corridor • Mississippi River Fund • Missouri Coalition for the Environment • Missouri River Initiative of Izaak Walton League of America • Missouri River Waterfowlers Association • Open Space Council • Prairie Rivers Network • South Dakota Wildlife Federation • Tennessee Clean Water Network • Wolf Rive Conservancy • Yell County Wildlife Federation**

June 21, 2011

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Re: River Communities Need a New Approach to Water Resources Planning

Dear President Obama:

The 44 undersigned organizations call on your Administration to chart a new path forward for the nation's river communities through fundamental changes to the water resources planning principles and guidelines (the P&G). The P&G, which are currently being revised by your Administration, should require that federal investments in water resources protect and restore the natural flood fighting defenses of the nation's rivers and wetlands.

Communities throughout the Mississippi and Missouri River basins are once again facing record floods that are destroying homes and businesses, and causing enormous suffering. These floods will add to a long history of economic burdens created by poor federal water planning in this region of the country. For example, flawed federal projects were the primary cause of the massive flooding and devastation of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Flawed federal projects increased the crest of the Great Midwest Flood of 1993, which was the costliest U.S. river flood in history causing damages totaling \$23 billion. Flawed federal projects continue to contribute to the destruction of more than a football field of coastal Louisiana wetlands each and every hour.

While there are many contributing factors to the current flooding, it is clear that federal water projects and federal river management have played a major role in increasing the severity of these and other floods across the country. Federal planning for the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers has produced poorly timed releases from upstream federal reservoirs that increase flood crests; levees that have raised flood heights by three to five feet while creating a false sense of safety; and thousands of river “training” structures designed to facilitate barge traffic that scientists estimate have raised flood levels by up to 15 feet in some locations. These and other federal projects have eliminated much of the natural flood fighting defenses provided by the rivers’ floodplains and delta wetlands at federal taxpayer expense.

While the problems created by these projects will not be solved overnight, they are reversible. A P&G that requires our federal agencies to protect and restore the natural flood fighting defenses of the nation’s rivers and wetlands would provide a vital tool for improving the health, safety, and well being of river communities for generations to come. To help achieve these goals, the new P&G should:

- Require that new federal water projects and investments protect and restore the floodplains and wetlands of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers and their tributaries and distributaries, and of the nation’s other rivers and require that existing federal projects be managed to protect communities from floods;
- Require that federal planners take all steps possible to avoid and minimize adverse environmental impacts *and* recommend the use of less environmentally damaging alternatives, including nonstructural, water efficiency, and restoration approaches where practicable; and
- Require that federal investments in restoration, including restoration of the Mississippi River delta and Louisiana’s coastal wetlands, work to restore, enhance, and protect ecosystem functions and processes in order to improve ecosystem health, sustainability, and resiliency, and be cost-effective.

It is critical that the new P&G provide clear direction and criteria for future federal investments in water resources projects and require that the federal agencies follow those directions. A P&G that is merely advisory in nature cannot guarantee the change in the status quo approach to planning that the nation so desperately needs. Our organizations look forward to working with Administration officials over the coming months to implement these changes that are so essential for a safe and productive future.

Sincerely,

Kathy Andria  
President  
American Bottom Conservancy, IL

Jim Wood  
Executive Board Member  
Arkansas Wildlife Federation, AR

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Jerry Bahls  
Board Member  
Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis, MN

Jennifer Browning  
Executive Director  
Biodiversity Project, IL

Hal Sprague  
Manager - Water Policy  
Center for Neighborhood Technology, IL

John Koefel  
President  
Citizens Against Widening the Industrial  
Canal, LA

Clark Bullard  
Director  
Committee on the Middle Fork Vermilion  
River, IL

Haywood Martin  
Chair  
Delta Chapter Sierra Club, LA

John L. Devney  
Senior Vice President  
Delta Waterfowl Foundation

Laura Calwell  
Kansas Riverkeeper  
Friends of the Kaw/Kansas Riverkeeper, KS

Jane Darr  
President  
Friends of the North Fork and White Rivers,  
AR

Bruce Morrison  
Great Rivers Environmental Law Center,  
MO

Cynthia Sarthou  
Executive Director  
Gulf Restoration Network, LA

Julia Olmstead  
Policy Analyst  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy,  
MN

Charles Winterwood  
Political Chair  
Iowa Chapter Sierra Club, IA

Marian Riggs Gelb  
Executive Director  
Iowa Environmental Council, IA

Rosalyn Lehman  
Executive Director  
Iowa Rivers Revival, IA

Paul Lepisto  
Regional Conservation Coordinator  
Missouri River Initiative of Izaak Walton  
League of America, SD, NE, IA

Evangelist Dr. Charlotte L. Keys  
Founder & Executive Director  
Jesus People Against Pollution, MS

Jim Mason  
Secretary of the Board  
Kansas Natural Resource Council, KS

Steve Sorensen  
Conservation VP  
Kansas Wildlife Federation, KS

Tom FitzGerald  
Director  
Kentucky Resources Council, KY

John Lopez  
Executive Director  
Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, LA

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Anne Rolfes  
Executive Director  
Louisiana Bucket Brigade, LA

Marylee M. Orr  
Executive Director  
Louisiana Environmental Action Network,  
LA

Paul Orr  
Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper, LA

John Ruskey  
Director  
Lower Mississippi River Foundation, MS

Tracy Nelson  
Executive Director  
Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable  
Engagement and Development, LA

Victoria Johnson  
Conservation Director  
Mid South Fly Fishers, TN

Cheryl Nenn  
Riverkeeper  
Milwaukee Riverkeeper, WI

Gary Botzek  
Executive Director  
Minnesota Conservation Federation, MN

Larry Dolphin  
President  
Minnesota Division of Izaak  
Walton League of America, MN

Tom Bell  
Minnesota Ornithologists' Union, MN

Louie Miller  
State Director  
Mississippi Chapter of the Sierra Club, MS

Diana Threadgill  
Executive Director  
Mississippi River Corridor - TN

Katie Nyberg  
Executive Director  
Mississippi River Fund, MN

Kat Logan Smith  
Executive Director  
Missouri Coalition for the Environment, MO

Bill Smith  
President  
Missouri River Waterfowlers Association  
IA/NE

Ron Coleman  
Executive Director  
Open Space Council, MO

Glynnis Collins  
Executive Director  
Prairie Rivers Network, IL

Chris Hesla  
Executive Director  
South Dakota Wildlife Federation, SD

Dana Wright  
Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs  
Tennessee Clean Water Network, TN

Larry Smith  
Former Executive Director  
Wolf Rive Conservancy, TN

James Manatt  
President  
Yell County Wildlife Federation, AR

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cc:

Mr. William Daley, Chief of Staff

Ms. Nancy Ann DeParle, Deputy Chief of Staff

Mr. Pete Rouse, Senior Advisor

Mr. David Plouffe, Senior Advisor

The Honorable Nancy Sutley, Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality

The Honorable Jack Lew, Director of the Office of Management and Budget

The Honorable Cass Sunstein, Administrator, Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs

The Honorable Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior

The Honorable Lisa Jackson, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency

The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture

The Honorable Gary Locke, Secretary of Commerce

The Honorable Jo-Ellen Darcy, Army Assistant Secretary for Civil Works

The Honorable Jane Lubchenco, Undersecretary of Commerce

The Honorable W. Craig Fugate, Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency

Mr. John Tubbs, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, Department of the Interior

Mr. Rowan Gould, Acting Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service