

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

President Obama

June 21, 2011

Page 3

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

President Obama

June 21, 2011

Page 4

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

President Obama

June 21, 2011

Page 5

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