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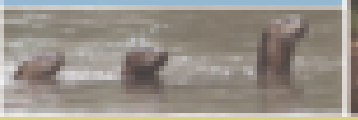

Protecting Illinois' Rivers for People, Fish, and Wildlife

MORE THAN 50,000 ACRES OF WETLANDS SAVED

FISH AND PARTNERS STOP THE NEW MADRID LEVEE

BY KIM SCHOFIELD

Since news regarding the New Madrid levee project in a valuable final set to protect both people and wildlife, the Obama Administration issued a decision making it nearly impossible for the Army Corps of Engineers to build the New Madrid levee.

If built, the levee would have cut off a vitally important connection between the Mississippi River and its backwater habitat, destroying more than 50,000 acres of wetlands that give life to hundreds of species of fish, waterfowl, and migratory birds, like the wood duck shown pictured below. The connection is the last of its kind in Missouri. The levee would have increased the risk of flooding to towns like Cairo, Olive Branch, and Metropolis. Residents in each of these towns have seen their homes and livelihoods destroyed by past flooding. With one of President Obama's final acts, this habitat and these communities will be spared.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS

Through the Council on Environmental Quality, the Obama Administration brokered an agreement between the Army Corps of Engineers and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service setting forth improvements the Army Corps must meet in order to construct the project. The requirements call for the creation of a new river connection on the Mississippi River that would allow fish unrestricted access to the floodplain, the preservation of a natural hydrologic connection between the Mississippi River and Big Oak Tree State Park, and maintenance of natural flooding in the New Madrid Floodway all way all orders.

We believe these requirements create insurmountable obstacles to the building of the New Madrid levee.

A Collaborative Campaign

How did we accomplish this great success? In every sense of the word, it was truly a collaborative effort. Prairie Rivers Network gives a special shout out to the National Wildlife Federation for its stellar leadership, and to the citizens and leaders of Cairo, Olive Branch, Miranda, and Metropolis. Big partners also include the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (IL and MO), American Rivers, Green Rivers Environmental Law Center, Illinois Rivers Club, Green Rivers Habitat Alliance, and the Mineral Coalition for the Environment.

Together, we employed a variety of strategies with key members of Congress, federal and state agency directors, community leaders, and environmental groups. We used Capitol Hill visits, agency meetings, phone calls, citizen petitions, natural media, and a robust social media campaign. And together we did accomplishment.

As these troubling times, we must take time to celebrate our victories and take solace in the strength of our collaborations. And if need be, we'll do up once again and make any attempt to preserve the New Madrid Levee.

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