

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

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River work creates jobs

As Congress considers an economic stimulus plan, the Carpenters Union and Audubon Society join a larger waterways coalition advocating for the funding of an important jobs creation initiative: The Mississippi River's Navigation-Ecosystem Sustainability Program. Authorized in 2007, NESP addresses both economic and environmental river needs.

NESP would create thousands of construction jobs to ensure an environmentally sustainable mode for transporting our nation's cargo and include river ecosystem restoration. Wetlands help keep our rivers, wildlife habitats and drinking waters healthy. Yet, despite their environmental significance, more than 15,000 wetland acres are lost annually. Congress must commit to the health of our rivers.

The economic and environmental merits of barge transportation are obvious, particularly with our energy challenges. A single tow moves the same as 1,050 trucks or 2,160 trucks for liquid cargo. Our economic anchors — coal, cement, petroleum products, steel and others — need to be moved efficiently during the coming infrastructure reinvestment. Rivers move our nation's agricultural exports, one of the few positive sectors in our international trade balance.

The Department of Transportation estimates that 35,000 jobs would be created for each \$1 billion invested in infrastructure projects, providing good wages for jobs that can't be outsourced on projects that are sorely needed. NESP also would help to create jobs associated with the health and enjoyment of our most iconic natural resources. This dual-purpose investment is a rare win-win. Congress should join us in putting people to work for a great river.

Patricia Hagen | St. Louis, Exec. Director, St. Louis Audubon Center Project

Dale Roth | St. Louis, Business Agent, Carpenters District Council for Greater St. Louis and Vicinity