



December 9, 2021

Mr. Michael Connor
Assistant Secretary to the Army (Civil Works)
108 Army Pentagon
Room 3E446
Washington, D.C. 20310-0108

Dear Secretary Connor:

On behalf of the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association (UMRBA), I am writing to offer our congratulations on your confirmation as the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works and offer ourselves as a partner in advancing our shared priorities for the Upper Mississippi River System. UMRBA is the Governor-established forum for interstate water resource planning and management on the Upper Mississippi River System, representing its member states of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin. Through their steady, 40-year commitment to UMRBA, the states work diligently with our federal partners and stakeholders to advance multi-use management of the river, facilitating and fostering cooperative planning and coordinated management of the Upper Mississippi River basin's water and related land resources.

As you evaluate the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' spending priorities through the appropriations process and as authorized in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, we would like to convey the importance of the Upper Mississippi River System (Upper Mississippi) and to respectfully request that substantial investment is directed towards improving its natural and structural infrastructure.

UMRBA's priorities include responding to modern shipping needs, fulfilling habitat needs for fish and wildlife and restoring the river's ecological health, developing sound solutions to more extreme high- and low-water conditions, and ensuring that clean water is available to communities for drinking water as well as industrial and agricultural uses. Building upon the Upper Mississippi River's deeply rooted partnership and successes in effective multi-purpose management, UMRBA's funding and policy priorities are to:

- Start construction of the **Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP)**
- Invest in the **Upper Mississippi River Restoration (UMRR)** program at its full authorized annual appropriation
- Reform the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' **project partnership agreements** to eliminate a significant impediment to public-private partnerships in advancing important water resource projects
- Renew **flow frequency profiles** on the Upper Mississippi River to inform the development of systemic approaches to improve resilience to major floods
- Maintain the deeply rooted **federal-state cooperation and relationships** in advancing multi-purpose management
- Fully engage and support UMRBA-led long term planning related to **integrated and balanced Upper Mississippi River and watershed management**

The Upper Mississippi River is a large, complex, and dynamic system that serves as a nationally significant economic, environmental, and social resource – generating revenues in excess of \$584 billion annually and supporting over 1.86 million jobs in manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, recreation, navigation, and energy sectors. The river also provides an irreplaceable water supply source for citizens and industries throughout the Midwest. The system of locks and dams provides for the movement of low-cost goods that are essential to a strong national economy: agricultural commodities and inputs, energy products, gravel, and salt. At the same time, the Upper Mississippi supports a \$55 billion tourism and recreation industry built upon the serenity and adventure of the river's landscape and abundant opportunities for fishing and hunting.

The river is heavily influenced by human activity throughout its watershed, requiring balanced, integrated, and collaborative management that exceeds the capacity and authority of any one entity. We believe the challenges associated with increasing precipitation in the Midwest along with intensified land use and the spread of invasive species will require even stronger connections among the state and federal agencies with river-related responsibilities. The complex nature of the river system and array of human uses requires thoughtful and inclusive dialogue among the diverse suite of stakeholder representatives throughout the region.

We strongly value our mutual commitment with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to advance Congress' vision of the river as a "nationally significant ecosystem and a nationally significant navigation system." And, we recognize that much work remains especially as stressors continue to degrade the river's rich and diverse ecosystem and the navigation channel's efficiency and sustainability.

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UMRBA's member states are eager to work with you and your Administration. UMRBA's Executive Director Kirsten Wallace will contact your office to request an opportunity to discuss our recommendations in more detail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dru Buntin". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Dru Buntin, Chair

Upper Mississippi River Basin Association

cc: Shalanda D. Young, Director of Office of Management and Budget
Maj. Gen. Diana Holland, MVD Commander