

Act Now: The Future of the Missouri River

Nebraska Wildlife Federation Members Make Your Voices Heard to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - public comment period ends September 20th.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is beginning a long over-due study of the 66-year old Pick-Sloan/Flood Control Act of 1944. The study, called the Missouri River Authorized Purposes Study (MRAPS), is to determine if the designated “uses” established in 1944 are still relevant today. This will be a comprehensive study of infrastructure and management of the river, the priorities of the authorized uses, and citizen expectations and values as they relate to the river.

The Corps is asking for public input. *The comment deadline is Monday, Sept. 20.* We need input from conservationists, environmental supporters, hunters, fishermen, bird watchers, boaters - anyone who loves the outdoors and wants to protect our natural resources for future generations - to ask the Corps to make fish and wildlife, river recreation, and river corridor restoration a high priority resource use.

Over the past 66 years, the river has been extremely modified to accommodate designated “uses”, especially navigation (barge traffic), flood control, irrigation and hydropower. The river has been straightened and deepened, meanders eliminated, habitat lost, and the upper 1/3 of the river has been converted to one large reservoir after another. 70-90% of the aquatic invertebrates which used to be in the river have been lost in the lower basin, from Gavin’s Point Dam to the river’s mouth in St. Louis. Fifty-one of 67 native fish species in this segment are now classified as rare or declining, and the pallid sturgeon is endangered and continuing to decline. Adjoining wetlands have been drained for agriculture, and riverine habitat and the cottonwoods – of great cultural importance to Native Americans - have been greatly reduced or eliminated altogether. Nearly all of the “uses” of the river have received priority over the Fish and Wildlife use during these past 66 years.

The future management of the Missouri River will depend greatly on the outcome of this study. There are those who wish to maintain the status quo and for the Corps to continue to place the greatest priority on navigation, flood control, irrigation, and hydropower. These interests have been very vocal. ***We ask you to please state your desire to see ecosystems restored and for Fish and Wildlife to be a top priority in the future management of the river.*** A more naturally flowing river with habitats restored and greater public accessibility for river recreation will benefit all of our communities and preserve our Missouri River for future generations.

Comments can be sent simply in an e-mail to mraps@usace.army.mil, or you can send comments by filling in an online survey at www.mraps.org. Please feel free to cut and paste from the above paragraphs.

Your comments are vitally needed! It is time that our voices are heard on behalf of the natural communities, habitats and wildlife of the river. Thank you for your help.