



Upper
Mississippi River
Basin Association

ILLINOIS, IOWA, MINNESOTA, MISSOURI, WISCONSIN

August 20, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

The passage of the 2014 Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA) signifies a new era for the nation's investment in water resources, improving project delivery, offering additional financing options, and expanding the Inland Waterways Trust Fund's ability to support critical navigation projects. Further, in the Conference Committee report on WRRDA, Congressional members specifically acknowledged the Upper Mississippi River System (Upper Mississippi) as the only system designated as a "nationally significant ecosystem and nationally significant commercial navigation system" and declared their ongoing commitment to the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP).

As the Administration formulates its fiscal year 2016 budget, we urge you to prioritize construction funding for NESP to immediately construct small-scale navigation efficiency improvements and ecological restoration projects, as well as to continue designing at least one 1,200-foot lock, per the sequencing recommendations of the Inland Waterways Users Board. Funding for NESP was last appropriated in 2011. Under current law, it could be deauthorized if it does not receive funding in 2016, undoing years of multi-state collaboration and study. The time is now to both address the navigation system's longstanding needs and ensure its capacity to relieve congestion on other parts of our nation's multi-modal infrastructure.

Several small-scale projects developed through NESP are ready for construction as soon as funding permits. These include switchboats at Locks 20-25 to facilitate double-cut lockages and downbound lock approaches; mooring cells at Locks 14, 22, and La Grange to provide waiting stations in closer proximity to the locks; and a guidewall extension at Lock 22 to better assist operators in transiting through the lock chamber. These projects will provide substantial benefits to the region at relatively little cost. Several habitat restoration projects are also ready for construction once funding is available that would have tremendous ecological and economic benefits, including water level management and riverbank forest restoration. With a long term monitoring component, NESP will build off of the region's

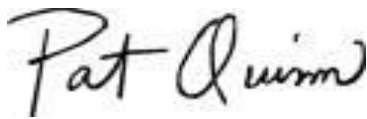
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ongoing successes in improving the river's health and resilience and increasing our understanding of its complex ecosystem.

To address critical capacity constraints on the Upper Mississippi from outdated and deteriorating infrastructure, it is prudent that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers continue planning for at least one of NESP's seven-authorized 1,200-foot locks to be ready for construction at the earliest possible opportunity. The planned infrastructure improvements through NESP have been designed to substantially lower transportation costs by increasing the system's reliability and efficiency, eliminate or minimize safety risks, and stimulate market opportunities. These infrastructure improvements will also allow the region to capitalize on the Panama Canal's expansion, which will make international commerce even faster and less expensive.

Our region's prosperity and quality of life depend upon the Mississippi River's continuing viability as a commercial transportation system, particularly for its ability to move a substantial portion of the nation's agricultural exports to the Gulf of Mexico, as well as a rich and diverse ecosystem, a source of water supply, and a recreational resource. Thus, we, the Governors of States bordering the Upper Mississippi, have a vested interest in ensuring that the Upper Mississippi continues to function as a vital commercial transportation corridor — connecting our states to the world economy — and as a globally significant ecological resource to support the river's multiple uses.


Thank you for your consideration.



Pat Quinn
Governor of Illinois



Terry E. Branstad
Governor of Iowa



Mark Dayton
Governor of Minnesota



Jeremiah W. (Jay) Nixon
Governor of Missouri



Scott Walker
Governor of Wisconsin