



Upper Mississippi River Basin Association

ILLINOIS, IOWA, MINNESOTA, MISSOURI, WISCONSIN

PRESS RELEASE

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Upper Mississippi and Illinois River Communities and Stakeholders Define a Path Forward for Better Managing Floods and Sediment

St. Paul, MN — The States of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin are bringing together those who live and work in the floodplain to improve disaster preparedness, economic growth and resilience, and ecological health. As a first step, the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association (UMRBA, the Governors' joint interstate collaborative) convened members of the floodplain community who recognized that solutions reside in our ability to work together and integrate science-based knowledge of watershed and floodplain dynamics.

The summit revealed that the floodplain community shares very similar experiences living and working on the river, particularly in relation to the changing flooding and sediment flow dynamics, from the Twin Cities of Minnesota to the confluence of the Ohio River in Cairo, Illinois and throughout the Illinois River. Participants pointed to land use development in the watershed and floodplain as well as changing weather patterns as causing the watershed to behave differently.

The watershed is sending an excessive volume of water and sediment through the floodplain at a high velocity that is surpassing the floodplain's capacity to handle. Lack of an agreed-upon approach, coordination, and investment to effectively manage floods and excessive sedimentation are compounding the challenges. Existing plans have proven helpful but are now mostly based on outdated information. The issues are profoundly acute for river cities and towns bordering the river and shippers and consumers reliant on the 9-foot navigation system. Flooding and sedimentation also reduce the river's overall ecological health, limiting the availability and quality of habitat for fish and wildlife.

To the surprise of many participants, the floodplain community also shares many of the same perspectives for improving preparedness and reducing impacts of major flood and sediment-related events. This includes employing a collaborative, science-based process to develop a systemic flood risk and sediment management plan; convening the river-floodplain community more frequently and formally to discuss issues and collaborate on solutions; addressing specific policy impediments; securing resource needs; and improving and better utilizing knowledge.

The Summit was an important step forward in UMRBA's longer-term vision for fostering a dynamic, balanced, objective, and adaptive approach to improving management of floods and the 9-foot navigation channel. UMRBA is preparing to undertake a transparent and collaborative planning process in collaboration with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers through a Section 729 watershed planning authority. The planning process would involve consultation of local communities throughout the floodplain and watershed, waterways industry, conservation organizations, and state and federal agencies. UMRBA has agreed to serve as the non-federal cost-share sponsor and, together with the five river states, will contribute 25 percent of the study costs.

A brochure of the July 2017 Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers Flood Risk and Sediment Management Summit is available at <http://umrba.org/2017flood-sediment-summit.pdf>.

About the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association — The Upper Mississippi River Basin Association (UMRBA) is a five-state interstate organization formed by the Governors of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin to coordinate the states' river-related programs and policies and work with federal agencies that have river responsibilities. The UMRBA is structured as a 501(c) non-profit association, with the Board of Directors composed of all duly Governor-appointed representatives and alternatives. For more information about UMRBA, visit its website at www.umrba.org.