

**Minutes of the
Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program
Coordinating Committee**

**November 20, 2024
Quarterly Meeting**

Alton, IL

Sabrina Chandler of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. on November 20, 2024. Other UMRR Coordinating Committee representatives present were Kelly Keefe (USACE), Jeff Houser (USGS), Dave Glover (Illinois DNR), Kirk Hansen (Iowa DNR), Liz Scherber (Minnesota DNR), Matt Vitello (Missouri DoC), and Vanessa Perry (Wisconsin DNR). A complete list of attendees follows these minutes.

Minutes of the August 7, 2024, Meeting

Matt Vitello moved, and Vanessa Perry seconded a motion to approve the draft minutes of the August 7, 2024, meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

Regional Management and Partnership Collaboration

Fiscal Report

The partnership that supports UMRR (federal agencies, states, and nongovernmental organizations) has experienced widespread turnover in representation. Considering that, Marshall Plumley presented a general overview of the program for new representatives to the UMRR-CC.

Plumley announced that UMRR executed 98.2 percent of its FY 2024 appropriation of \$55 million appropriation as well as the funds carried over from FY 2023. Plumley acknowledged the contributions of all UMRR partners who are involved in the program's implementation.

Plumley reported that the House of Representatives and Senate Appropriations Committee have included \$55 million in their respective FY 2025 energy and water appropriations measures, aligning with the President's FY 2025 budget proposal. Federal agencies are currently operating under a continuing resolution, which is set to expire in late December 2024. In the interim, the Corps is allocating funds per a \$55 million planning assumption for UMRR in FY 2025.

Through draft Water Resource Development Act of 2024 bills, the Senate and House of Representatives are proposing to increase the program's annual authorized appropriation for long term resource monitoring from \$15 million to \$25 million.

Program Efforts Schedule

The St. Paul District has kicked off a new HREP focused on bank stabilization on the Minnesota River. In the Rock Island District, the Pool 12 Forestry HREP feasibility report is nearing completion. The St. Louis District

has postponed the start of the Meredosia Island HREP. There are 26 HREPs in progress, and the HREPs scheduled from now through 2036 will benefit 69,000 acres of habitat.

In response to a question from Bryan Hopkins, Plumley clarified that the 69,000-acre estimate includes acres that will be impacted outside of the HREP footprints. In response to the partnership expressing interest in developing standardized practices for monitoring HREPs, Plumley proposed establishing an HREP monitoring team in January 2025. Over the winter, Plumley will submit a request to the Coordinating Committee for team assignments.

Plumley presented a draft 10-year timeline of programmatic efforts. UMRR is developing a regular cadence for holding a science meeting and the UMRR habitat-focused workshop so that they do not occur in the same year. In response to a question from Matt Vitello, Plumley clarified that he anticipates that the third Habitat Needs Assessment will be initiated at some point in the next ten years. Kelly Keefe suggested that it be timed with HREP progress. In response to a question from Bryan Hopkins, Plumley stated that the third Habitat Needs Assessment will also be relevant to other federal and state programs (e.g., NESP). In response to a question from Vanessa Perry, Plumley noted that the 2025-2035 UMRR Strategic Plan will inform the priority and sequence of the various programmatic efforts, including other emerging priorities such as tribal engagement and environmental justice.

USACE Headquarters Staff Visit to the Region

Corps Headquarters representatives visited the region on October 7-10, 2024. Their visit included touring multiple HREPs, participating in an LTRM electrofishing demonstration, and engaging with UMRR partners and stakeholders. The Headquarters staff, who work in policy and budget development for the Corps, expressed strong enthusiasm for UMRR's work and the partnership that was demonstrated throughout their visit. Brian Stenquist and Sadie Neuman both commented on the success of the visit.

HREP Selection

UMRR program partners continue to work through the process of evaluating potential project opportunities and selecting a suite of projects for implementation in FYs 2026 through 2030. River teams are currently drafting fact sheets for their proposed projects. The UMRR Coordinating Committee is anticipated to review and approve fact sheets by the third quarter of FY 2025 – i.e., April 2025 through June 2025. The Corps will incorporate parametric cost data into the fact sheets ahead of the feasibility studies.

Plumley stated intentions for the UMRR Coordinating Committee to evaluate ways to incorporate environmental justice into project fact sheets. Bryan Hopkins said The Nature Conservancy is working on similar efforts and has learned the importance of flexibility. Hopkins suggested that UMRR build in flexibility for process improvements as feedback is received. Vanessa Perry suggested that the program couple this environmental justice effort with the communications work described in the new strategic plan. In response to a question from Liz Scherber, Plumley clarified that the Corps will be using Justice40 data from the census in this effort. In response to a question from Sadie Neuman on external engagement, Plumley stated that the strategic plan calls on the program to reach out to external stakeholders to seek ways to leverage existing resources, and that the Corps will work with the partnership to develop this strategy.

Strategic Planning

The UMRR Coordinating Committee and other meeting participants reviewed draft mission and vision statements and goals and objectives for the program drafted by the UMRR strategic planning team. The notes from the discussion will be shared with the strategic planning team. The team is scheduled to meet in person on December 5-6, 2024, to finalize strategies and actions for program work from 2025 to 2035. The next phase of the strategic planning process will be to initiate a public review process. The strategic plan is anticipated to be finalized in summer 2025. Checkpoints will be built into the plan's implementation schedule to allow the partnership to evaluate UMRR's progress in meeting the strategic plan's goals, objectives, strategies, and actions over the ten years.

Chrissa Waite led attendees through a strategic planning exercise. The worksheet used to facilitate the exercise is included in the meeting packet.

Communications

Communications and Outreach Team

Rachel Perrine reported on the accomplishments and ongoing activities of the UMRR Communications and Outreach Team (COT). On August 1, 2024, UMRR initiated a photo contest among UMRR partners to obtain visuals for use in UMRR's program materials and communications. Round two of judging the photo contest entries starts on November 13, 2024. Perrine anticipates that the COT will support communications of the 2022 UMRR Report to Congress, the 2025-2035 Strategic Plan, and the program's 40th anniversary. In response to a question from Jeff Houser, Perrine stated that the intention is to have photos from the contest available to the partnership for programmatic use, but a barrier is finding a central repository.

Partner Activities

UMRR Coordinating Committee members and partners shared their respective UMRR-related communications or engagements over the last quarter that relate to UMRR, as follows:

- USFWS Sabrina Chandler and Stephen Winter were featured on an episode of Wisconsin Public Radio's Larry Meiller Show in September.
- America's Watershed Initiative toured the Mississippi Valley NWR during its September Board meeting.
- Wisconsin DNR hosted statewide DNR water quality staff in La Crosse during which Wisconsin DNR connected its agency's partnership in UMRR, and specifically in implementing LTRM.
- The U.S. House and Senate are conferencing on WRDA, which proposes to increase the annual appropriation amount for UMRR long term resource monitoring from \$15 million to \$25 million. UMRBA has submitted letters to Congress as WRDA was being drafted. The letters can be found on the UMRBA website.
- The Mississippi River Network hosted a webinar highlighting LTRM. The webinar received a record number of registrants.
- USGS Midcontinent Region will staff a booth at the Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conference in January 2025.
- The ribbon cutting event for the Beaver Island HREP included attendees from several local TV stations.

UMRR Showcases

Understanding Ecological Response to Physical Characteristics in Side Channels of UMRS

Kristen Bouska presented LTRM research on physical controls of side channels in the Upper Mississippi River System. The study used LTRM annual fish collection data to investigate the association between the physical attributes of side channels and their ecological roles. Bouska reported that the amount of wet forest along the shoreline was positively correlated with species richness; there was a decreased species richness with increased water depth.

Bouska mentioned that a project proposal related to this study was submitted to the UMRR partnership for consideration of funding during the most recent UMRR Science Meeting. While it wasn't selected, the research team plans to resubmit a revised proposal at the next meeting. Bouska concluded by asking that attendees send her any related side channel work.

Henry Hansen commented that the age of side channels seems to be an important variable in studies being published in Europe. In response to a question from Dave Glover on "correcting" fisheries data to include catchability, Bouska responded that the study used species richness due to being uncomfortable using catch data. Hansen noted that accounting for seasonal differences could be beneficial to future work.

Piasa and Eagles Island HREP

Jasen Brown presented on the Piasa and Eagles Island HREP that many attendees toured in conjunction with the UMRBA Quarterly Meeting on November 19, 2024. The HREP involves constructing 70 acres of island habitat and dredge over two miles of deep water. A dike was constructed between the two islands to mitigate the side channels filling in with sediment. Notching the dike structure redirects most of the sediment from entering the side channels. Stage 2 of construction was completed this quarter and the anticipated completion date for the project is in FY 2027. As a means for public engagement, UMRR hosted a contest in local grade schools to name the three islands involved in the project.

Program Reports

Long Term Resource Monitoring, Research, and Other Science

Quarterly Progress Report

Jeff Houser reported that the accomplishments of the fourth quarter of FY 2024 include the publication of the following six manuscripts that were supported by UMRR funding and the partnership infrastructure:

- 1) Climate, Hydrology, and Nutrients Control the Seasonality of Si Concentrations in Rivers.
- 2) USGS Powell Center Project: Are we experiencing a river silicon surge? Implications for nutrient stoichiometry and the global carbon cycle.
- 3) Upper Mississippi River System Hydrogeomorphic Change Conceptual Model and Hierarchical Classification.
- 4) Population structure and vital rates of Shortnose Gar *Lepisosteus platostomus* in a large floodplain river.

- 5) Spatial and Ontogenetic Patterns in the Trophic Ecology of Two Predatory Fishes in a Large River.
- 6) Relationships between environmental variables and fish functional groups in impounded reaches of the Upper Mississippi and Yangtze Rivers.

Houser said USGS provided several presentations about long term resource monitoring research and analysis at the American Fisheries Society 2024 Annual Meeting.

Per the UMRR implementation planning recommendations, USGS and the broader LTRM partnership are focused on evaluating floodplain vegetation change across the Upper Mississippi River System and researching the lower trophic contribution – i.e., zooplankton and phytoplankton. A program-level workshop to develop a long-term floodplain vegetation monitoring plan is scheduled to be held January 7-9, 2025, in the Quad Cities. A working group will be established to identify, assemble, and evaluate existing floodplain vegetation data sets. In the future, the group hopes to develop public online tools to facilitate data sharing and visualization of existing floodplain vegetation data. USGS has hired Shelby Weiss and Matthew Trumper to assist in this floodplain vegetation monitoring planning effort.

The LTRM management team has undertaken a tour of the six LTRM field stations. The tour will be complete tomorrow, November 21, 2024, with a visit to the La Grange Pool Field Station in Havana, IL.

Fiscal Report

In FY 2025, total budget allocation for LTRM will increase to \$14.45 million: \$6.5 million for base monitoring, \$2 million for analysis under base, and \$5.95 million for science in support of restoration and management. This increase is in recognition of increasing base monitoring costs over the past several years.

Topobathy acquisition is currently in process for the twelve awarded task orders for the Lower Pool 13 pilot and the entire Illinois River and Open River Reach 2 on the Mississippi. In response to a question from Matt Vitello, Davi Michl clarified that it is estimated that the topobathy data will be processed and usable in a year.

A-Team Report

Matt O'Hara reported that the A-Team met on October 29, 2024. In addition to programmatic updates by the Corps and USGS, Shawn Giblin presented information on the decline of the burrowing mayfly populations in the Upper Mississippi and Steve Winter presented on the habitat needs of the canvasback in the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. The next A-Team meeting is scheduled for April 2025, in conjunction with the Mississippi River Research Consortium.

HREP Planning and Construction

Angela Deen, Julie Millhollin, and Brian Market reported on the progress in implementing UMRR HREPs, including the following milestones:

- The St. Paul District finished the Big Lake HREP feasibility study. With an estimated construction cost of around forty million dollars, the Big Lake HREP is the largest feasibility study ever completed by the St. Paul District.

- The St. Paul District completed four GIS storymaps of UMRR HREPs this year, which can be found on their website.
- The Rock Island District completed the first two construction stages of the Steamboat Island HREP.
- MVD approved the Rock Island District’s feasibility report for the Lower Pool 13 HREP. The project will now advance to design and construction.
- The St. Louis District completed a berm setback on the Clarence Cannon HREP.
- The St. Louis District completed Stage 2 of construction on the Piasa and Eagles Nest Islands HREP. The District hosted a tour of the HREP in conjunction with the UMRBA Quarterly Meeting on November 19, 2024.

Other Business

Future Meeting Schedule

- February 2025 through a virtual platform (not in-person)
 - UMRBA quarterly meeting – February 25
 - UMRR Coordinating Committee quarterly meeting – February 26
- May 2025 in La Crosse, Wisconsin
 - UMRBA quarterly meeting – May 20
 - UMRR Coordinating Committee quarterly meeting – May 21
- August 2025 in Minneapolis, Minnesota
 - UMRBA quarterly meeting – August 5
 - UMRR Coordinating Committee quarterly meeting – August 6

Attendance List

UMRR Coordinating Committee Members

Kelly Keefe	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Sabrina Chandler	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, UMR Refuges
Jeff Houser	U.S. Geological Survey, UMESC
Dave Glover	Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Kirk Hansen	Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Liz Scherber	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Matt Vitello	Missouri Department of Conservation
Vanessa Perry	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Others In Attendance

Brian Chewning	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVD
Jim Cole	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVD
LeeAnn Riggs	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVD
Thatch Shepard	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVD
Angela Deen	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVP
Nathan Wallerstedt	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVP
Marshall Plumley	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVR
Kyle Bales	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVR
Davi Michl	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVR
Julie Millhollin	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVR
Jessie Dunton	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVR
Rachel Perrine	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVR
Brian Markert	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVS
Jasen Brown	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVS
Chrissa Waite	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, SAC
Kraig McPeck	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services
Sara Schmuecker	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services
Jon Amberg	U.S. Geological Survey, UMESC
Kristen Bouska	U.S. Geological Survey, UMESC
Jim Fischer	U.S. Geological Survey, UMESC
JC Nelson	U.S. Geological Survey, Midcontinent Region
Matt O'Hara	Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Liz Scherber	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Sam Clary	Missouri Department of Conservation
Patrick Kelly	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Sierra Schuchard	America's Watershed Initiative
Brent Newman	Audubon
Alicia Vasto	Audubon
Anshu Singh	Corn Belt Ports
Christine Favilla	Sierra Club
Bryan Hopkins	The Nature Conservancy
Sarah Gatzke	The Nature Conservancy
Mark Hoague	Tetra Tech, Inc
Morgan Fong	National Waterways Conference
Kirsten Wallace	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association

Brian Stenquist	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
Mark Ellis	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
Henry Hansen	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
Sam Hund	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
Natalie Lenzen	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
Sadie Neuman	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
Ken Petersen	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
Lauren Salvato	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
Laura Talbert	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association