

**Minutes of the
176th Quarterly Meeting of the
Upper Mississippi River Basin Association**

**November 18, 2025
Virtual**

Wade Strickland called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. on November 18, 2025.

Participants were as follows:

UMRBA Representatives and Alternates

Rick Pohlman	Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Jake Hansen	Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship
Kirk Hansen	Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Grant Wilson	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Matt Vitello	Missouri Department of Conservation
Chris Wieberg	Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Erin Fanning	Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Chris Klenklen	Missouri Department of Agriculture
Levi Woods	Missouri Department of Transportation
Wade Strickland	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Federal UMRBA Liaisons:

Brian Chewning	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVD
Travis Black	U.S. Department of Transportation, MARAD
Sabrina Chandler	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
JC Nelson	U.S. Geological Survey, Midcontinent Region

Others In Attendance:

Chad Craycraft	Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Terra McParland	Illinois Department of Natural Resources
John Seitz	Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Ken Lubinski	Illinois Water Resources Center
Ryan Hupfled	Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Caleb Whitehouse	Iowa Department of Transportation
Liz Scherber	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Neil Rude	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Ken Henderson	Missouri Department of Agriculture

Dru Buntin	Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Erin Fanning	Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Billy Hackett	Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Chrystel Hillier	Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Colby Thrash	Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Michael Weller	Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Noah Cadwell	Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Sam Clary	Missouri Department of Conservation
Molly Sobotka	Missouri Department of Conservation
Vanessa Perry	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Sammi Boyd	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Partrick Kelly	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Chris Olds	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Kat McCain	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Headquarters
Kelly Keefe	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVD
Thatch Shepard	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVD
Jim Cole	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVD
Samantha Thompson	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVD
Kat McCain	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVD
Karl Jansen	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVP
Jill Bathke	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVP
Brad Houzenga	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVR
Marshall Plumley	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVR
Davi Michl	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVR
Shawn Sullivan	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVS
Greg Kohler	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVS
Brian Johnson	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVS
Joze Lopez	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVS
Shane Simmons	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, MVS
Steve Winter	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, UMR Refuges
Matt Mangan	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services
Jon Amberg	U.S. Geological Survey, UMESC
Jim Fischer	U.S. Geological Survey, UMESC
Jeff Houser	U.S. Geological Survey, UMESC
John Delaney	U.S. Geological Survey, UMESC
Jennifer Dieck	U.S. Geological Survey, UMESC
Andrew Strassman	U.S. Geological Survey, UMESC
David Pratt	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Jared Schmalstieg	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 7
Amy Shields	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 7
Madeleine Castle	Senator Josh Hawley Office
Kim Lutz	America's Watershed Initiative
Brent Newman	Audubon
Alicia Vasto	Audubon
Alexandra Campbell-Ferrari	Center for Water Security and Cooperation

Nancy Guyton	Friends of the Mississippi River
Ken Lubinski	Illinois Water Resources Center
Angela Grett	Ingram Marine Group
Barry Draskowski	Izaak Walton League
Mike Klingner	Klingner and Associates
Susan Russell Freeman	League of Women Voters, Upper Mississippi River Region
Karl Jefferson	LiUNA
Madeline Heim	Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
Colin Wellenkamp	Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative
Nicole Kach	National Waterways Conference
Nancy Guyton	Neighbors of the Mississippi
Kelly McGinnis	One Mississippi
Jill Crafton	Riley-Purgatory-Bluff Creek Watershed District
Christine Favilla	Sierra Club, Illinois Chapter
Andrew Stephenson	The Nature Conservancy
Aaron Field	Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Melissa Kenney	University of Minnesota
Kirsten Wallace	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
Brian Stenquist	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
Mark Ellis	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
Tyler Leske	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
Henry Hansen	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
Natalie Lenzen	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
Sadie Neuman	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
Laura Talbert	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
Josh Wolf	Upper Mississippi River Basin Association

Minutes

Grant Wilson moved and Rick Pohlman seconded a motion to approve the draft minutes of the August 5, 2025 meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

Executive Director's Report

Kirsten Wallace pointed to the Executive Director's report in the agenda packet for a summary of the Association's work efforts since the August 2025 meeting.

Wallace reported the following Association personnel changes:

- Lauren Salvato, Ken Peterson, and Sam Hund departed UMRBA. The latter two departures were a result of limited reimbursable funds to support UMRBA's hazardous spills planning.
- Sadie Nueman was appointed to serve as Acting Water Quantity Program Director.
- Josh Wolf was appointed to serve as Acting Water Quality Program Director.

Wallace thanked Nueman and Wolf for stepping into new roles and performing so well.

Wallace also expressed appreciation to Mark Ellis for assuming project coordinator for the Exchange Network Grant as well as for his supervision of the geospatial program team, particularly when funding has been limited and unknown.

Wallace elaborated on meetings with leaders of the Department of the Interior, USFWS, USGS, USEPA, and USACE. Wallace acknowledged, and expressed appreciation for, the participation of members of the Agricultural Nutrient Policy Council in meetings with USEPA and the Department of the Interior; the latter being in support of the UMRR long term resource monitoring.

UMRBA continues to coordinate a one-year project to implement the fixed site monitoring component of its UMR Interstate Water Quality Monitoring Plan. Monthly sampling began October 2025, continuing as planned through the federal government shutdown. Wallace applauded the work of Wolf and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the state agency personnel to coordinate their abilities to maintain their abilities to implement their roles in the monitoring. This includes continuing to operate laboratories. In particular, Wallace pointed out that the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency volunteered to conduct the sampling that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency would not be able to perform during the shutdown.

Wallace pointed to the UMRBA financial statements for July 2025 through September 2025 as provided on pages B-6 to B-14 of the agenda packet. Chris Wieberg moved and Rick Pohlman seconded the motion to accept the Association's budget report and balance sheet as included in the agenda packet. The motion was approved unanimously.

Water Availability

UMRBA Water Availability Project

Sadie Neuman reported on the status and future plans for implementing a hydrologic flow analysis for the Upper Mississippi River Basin, including project team members, project objectives, and anticipated project timeline.

The project objectives are to:

1. Estimate the existing hydrologic flows from the HUC-6 basin watersheds into the Upper Mississippi River System navigation channel
2. Explore how diversions and consumptive uses might affect the hydrologic flows from the basin watersheds into the Upper Mississippi River System navigation channel
3. Determine the thresholds of discharge in various reaches at which negative impacts may occur to the Upper Mississippi River System navigation channel (including duration and frequency of occurrence)
4. Scope follow-on research goals for assessing the implications of limited water availability for river products and services beyond the Upper Mississippi River System navigation channel
5. Convene interstate conversations among Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin technical experts and agency leaders to:
 - Evaluate the research findings
 - Related the research findings to management and policy decision making

- Recommend principles and policies for cooperative and effectively managing water resources of the Upper Mississippi River Basin

The University of Minnesota is a partner in this project, developing the models and information in project objectives one, two, and three. Neuman reviewed initial results provided by the University of Minnesota and provided a high level summary of the observations and input received from the technical project team members with respect to the initial results.

Proposal for Mississippi River Interstate Compact

Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative

Colin Wellenkamp reported on the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative's (MRCTI's) efforts to a) support Congress' efforts to pass legislation developing a disaster mitigation fund and b) compel the Mississippi River border states to enter into a interstate water compact.

Center for Water Security and Cooperation

Alexandra Campbell-Ferrari provided an overview of the Center for Water Security and Cooperation (CWSC) and its efforts to develop a multi-state water compact for the Mississippi River border states. Campbell-Ferrari shared the CWSC's efforts to build a network of local and Tribal leaders who share a commitment to watershed-level collaboration, named the Mighty Mississippi Leaders Network. Campbell-Ferrari suggested that this Network will help persuade state Governor offices to issue an executive order or other means for engaging in interstate water security agreements.

Pointing to the geographic scope of the 10 states bordering the Mississippi River, Chris Wieberg underscored the importance of flows from the Missouri River Basin and encouraged efforts to expand the geographic scope.

Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program

Brad Houzenga announced that Marshall Plumley will serve as the Program Manager for the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP) for the foreseeable future while also maintaining the role of Program Manager for the Upper Mississippi River Restoration (UMRR) Program.

L&D 25 1,200-Foot Chamber Project

Jose Lopez provided a status update of the NESP project to construct a second, 1,200-foot chamber at L&D 25. Lopez described the phases of construction, the status in implementing those phases, and outlooks for program implementation per fiscal year quarter.

A new lock wall was completed in March 2024. Fabrication of bulkheads is progressing on schedule. The St. Louis District plans to award a contract for lock foundation and site prep likely in spring 2026, but no later than September 2026. The last phase of the project is the construction of the main lock. The District is employing its final reviews of the design prior to initiating the solicitation phase. The Corps has approved the project's acquisition plan, which is contingent on the St. Louis District receiving an allocation of \$250 million in FY 2027.

In response to a question from Christine Favaiilla, Lopez confirmed that USACE completed the environmental compliance documents for the L&D 25 project, including purchasing mitigation credits related to the direct impacts of the project construction.

Floodplain Reach Ecosystem Planning

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Report

Jill Bathke described the NESP reach planning as a collaborative approach for envisioning and outlining a road map for where NESP projects and adaptive management will be planned and completed. NESP reach planning will offer watershed needs and goals that will inform the priorities.

Bathke reported that the Corps convened multiple meetings and workshops in each of the four floodplain reaches. The workshops were held in-person and involved nearly 30 federal and state agencies, local governments, and non-governmental organizations. Through the workshops, partners identified discrete locations for consideration as priority restoration areas, which are currently being reviewed, refined, summarized, and analyzed. The Corps is currently reach plans, which are anticipated to be shared with partners for review.

Bathke reported on the results of a Mississippi River and Illinois River Experience Tool, which is a survey mechanism to receive stakeholder input about the problems in the river and their views on how investment could improve the river's ecological health. So far, there have been 182 submissions of input to the Tool. The intention is to use the information from the submissions to inform NESP science efforts and project planning.

In response to a question from Wade Strickland, Bathke will use the input received through the Mississippi River and Illinois River Experience Tool in the development of NESP Floodplain Reach Plans and in scoping individual projects as well as future reach plans.

Public Engagement Workshops

Brent Newman provided an overview of a series of three public engagement workshops hosted by Audubon in summer 2025 regarding the NESP floodplain reach ecological planning. A primary purpose was to provide affected communities an opportunity to inform reach planning and future investments in their respective communities. In particular, Audubon's objectives for the public engagement sessions were to:

1. Widen the net for public input into NESP reach planning
2. Gain a sense of local communities' knowledge and aspirations regarding NESP and other USACE programs on the Upper Mississippi River System
3. Offer several different "avenues of interest" for residents who would like to stay engaged and learn more about NESP reach planning and operations and issues generally affecting management of the Upper Mississippi River System
4. Share the NESP River Experiences Tool

Each meeting used the same set of guided discussion prompts, including questions related to participants' interest in the Mississippi River, what they believe is working well, what they would want to protect about the Mississippi River, and actions they believe would improve the Mississippi River.

Newman said the engagement sessions received strong interest from the public, with participants generally underscoring the value of the opportunity and requesting more opportunities in the future. Newman summarized common input related to fish and wildlife habitat, flooding, navigation, recreation, and people and communities. A few highlights include species and habitat diversity, sedimentation, invasive species, high frequent areas of flooding (bottlenecks), beneficial reuse of dredged material, and public engagement and education.

Newman acknowledged the contributions and resources of other partner non-governmental organizations in convening the sessions and state and federal agencies, including UMRBA, for their time in informing the agenda and participating in the public engagement sessions.

UMRBA Advocacy

Kirsten Wallace reported that UMRBA is planning to advocate for \$350 million in FY 2027 appropriations for NESP, including \$250 million for the 1,200-foot lock at L&D 25 and \$100 million for ecosystem integrity improvements.

Flood Risk Reduction and Resilience Planning

Lower Missouri River Flood Risk Reduction and Resiliency Study

System Plan

Missouri DNR personnel Erin Fanning, Billy Hackett, Chrystal Hillier, Colby Thrash, and Michael Weller provided a progress update on the Lower Missouri River Flood Risk Reduction and Resiliency Study (LOMO Study).

Erin Fanning recalled the origins and purpose of the LOMO Study. In response to the 2019 flood event, through Executive Order, Missouri Governor Mike Parson established the Flood Recovery Advisory Working Group, which issued the following recommendations:

1. States should have a leadership role in implementing improvements to flood protection infrastructure and management of major river systems
2. Flood protection programs should prioritize long term and systemic solutions
3. Flood recovery programs should offer timely, common-sense solutions
4. Investment in flood and navigation infrastructure
5. The State of Missouri should develop flood recovery strategies

Fanning said state and Congressional leadership quickly responded to the recommendations by securing a new authority for the LOMO Study. The purpose of the study is to create a vision for a more resilient future on the Lower Missouri River with a focus on flood risk management and evaluate reach and system

specific alternatives and provide recommendations of future spin-off studies and proposed implementation approaches.

Fanning announced that the LOMO Study partners have drafted the Lower Missouri River Flood Risk and Resiliency Comprehensive Study. The study partners anticipate releasing the draft report in the near future with a request for input and a series of public meetings. Missouri DNR is planning to coordinate with its state Congressional delegation to secure authorities in WRDA 2026 related to the spin-off studies.

Spin-Off Studies

Fanning explained that four spin-off studies began prior to having completed the system plan, providing in-depth analyses to formulate local, problem-specific solutions. Missouri DNR has served as the non-federal sponsor, coordinating potential implementation sponsors and leveraging state funds, technical expertise, and communications and logistical capacity.

Fanning underscored that success only occurs if consensus is built among impacted stakeholders. Early, extensive, frequent, and intentional stakeholder engagement with impacted stakeholders is necessary to achieve solutions. The process for stakeholder engagement must involve a feedback loop with positive intention. Engagement should begin without a plan but with clarity for what is possible and not feasible in the project process and scope.

The Missouri DNR personnel team provided information about challenges, lessons, and project details related to spin-off studies at Jefferson City, Brunswick, Holt County, and Atchison County.

Michael Weller listed a set of implementation challenges experienced through the LOMO study process and policy recommendations to improve or address the challenges, as follows:

Challenges:

1. Feasibility studies result in unimplementable or unaffordable projects
2. USACE has a tendency to scope larger projects than communities can implement
3. A sufficiently high benefit-to-cost ratio is difficult to achieve in rural areas
4. Costs are high for federal levees
5. Projects need local support to be implemented
6. One person's flood risk improvement in another person's induced flood impact

Policy recommendations:

1. Develop a new continuing authorities program (CAP) specifically for levee setbacks not associated with flood damage repairs
2. Create a program to help potential sponsors with repair, replacement, and rehabilitation costs
3. Allow P.L. 84-99 to repair levees better than they were
4. Enable USACE to make flood resiliency improvements to non-federal levees in the P.L. 84-99 program without making the entirety a federal levee

5. Make it standard practice to include comprehensive benefits in benefit-to-cost ratio calculations

Chris Wieberg acknowledged the significant amount of staff personnel invested in the LOMO study and recognized that similar levels of effort would be required in the Upper Mississippi River System Flood Risk Reduction and Resiliency Study. Wieberg stated his assessment that the investment is worthwhile given the positive outcomes associated with the system plan and spin-off studies.

Upper Mississippi River System Study: Long Term Hydrologic Projections and Engaging Hard-to-Reach Communities

Melissa Kenney said that, in an effort to support regional resilience through projects focused on community involvement, NOAA funded pilot projects in seven regions across the country. In the Upper Mississippi River Basin, NOAA partnered with the University of Minnesota and UMRBA to estimate hydrologic risk of future floods and droughts and resilience opportunities for at-risk communities in the Upper Mississippi River Basin. Project components included hydrologic modeling, stakeholder engagement, community conversations, and community-led approaches to address flood risk and enhance flood resilience.

Kenney provided an overview of the modeling process and an example of the analysis of results. The University of Minnesota is preparing to submit the data and an associated paper with more comprehensive analyses for publication in spring 2026. Kenney concluded that this study should form the basis of future work and more detailed site-scale investigations, using more climate projections with different downscaling methods and higher spatial resolution.

Kenney explained that, as part of the project, the project research combines usability, visualization, and equity to improve decision support products, including products supporting hard-to-reach communities.

The University of Minnesota created a visualization of the information supply chain framework and developed actionable recommendations for reaching hard-to-reach communities, as follows:

1. Hazard and weather services should co-design warnings and preparedness messages with communities, deliver them through trusted insiders, and embed outreach in familiar settings such as schools, churches, shelters, and workplaces
2. Hazard and weather services should design technology systems that are co-created with users, integrated into daily workflows, and complemented by offline support to ensure access for all
3. Hazard and weather services should establish multi-sector coalitions that pool expertise, resources, and credibility to coordinate hazard communication and resource distribution
4. Hazard and weather services should design communication strategies that proactively include socially vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups by tailoring content, addressing layered barriers, and embedding services in accessible spaces
5. Hazard and weather services should decentralize communication and preparedness by delivering resources directly into neighborhoods, workplaces, and community hubs
6. Hazard and weather services should design communication strategies that explicitly address social and economic conditions that shape the ability to act on warnings

Administrative Matters

Future Meeting Schedule

February 2026 to be held virtually

- UMRBA Quarterly Meeting – February 24
- UMRB Coordinating Committee quarterly meeting – February 25

May 2026 to be held in the Twin Cities Metro Area

- UMRBA Quarterly Meeting – May 19
- UMRB Coordinating Committee quarterly meeting – May 20

August 2026 in St. Louis Metro Area

- UMRBA Quarterly Meeting – August 4
- UMRB Coordinating Committee quarterly meeting – August 5

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:48 p.m.