

**Statement to the Mississippi River Commission
St. Paul, Minnesota
August 8, 2016**

Good morning. My name is Dru Buntin, and I'm the Executive Director of the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association (UMRBA), the organization formed by the Governors of the five Upper Basin States of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri and Wisconsin to represent the States' common water resource interests and provide a forum for cooperation with our federal and nongovernmental partners at a regional scale. We are very pleased to have General Wehr and his fellow Commissioners on the upper river at the start of the Commission's annual low water trip.

The priority focus areas of the states' collective work through UMRBA are *Aquatic Nuisance Species, Commercial Navigation, Ecosystem Restoration and Monitoring, Flood Risk Management, Hydropower, Spill Response Planning and Mapping, and Water Quality*. Throughout the course of this week, we will be participating in a number of discussions with you on many of these topics. But, this morning I will highlight just a few items:

1. UMRBA is partnering with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Division of Economics, the Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI), and others to create an economic profile of the Upper Mississippi River System (UMRS). The preliminary results from a limited number of counties directly bordering the river showed that economic sectors in the corridor generate more than \$253 billion annually and support over 755,000 jobs. Manufacturing, tourism, and agriculture account for over 93 percent of the total revenue. We plan to have a profile for the entire Upper Mississippi River System (including the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers) finished later this year. This report will be comparable in approach to the Lower Mississippi River Economic Profile completed in 2014 by the Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee.
2. The Upper Mississippi River System is a vital component of the nation's inland waterway system and is extremely important to local, regional and national economies, particularly for its ability to efficiently move a substantial portion of the nation's agricultural exports to the Gulf of Mexico. Our states continue to strongly support funding for the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP) and its integrated approach to navigation system improvements and ecosystem restoration, while also advocating for increased operations and maintenance (O&M) funding to protect vital, existing infrastructure. Additionally, we support the appropriation of sufficient funding to completely match the navigation industry cost share available in the Inland Waterways Trust Fund (IWTF). This is especially important to us as current projections indicate sufficient industry revenue to support initiating major rehabilitation of La Grange Lock and Dam on the Illinois River – provided that sufficient federal funding is appropriated.

3. The Upper Mississippi River Restoration (UMRR) program was the first in the nation to combine ecosystem restoration with scientific monitoring and research on a large river system. UMRR has served the nation well since 1986, completing projects benefitting over 100,000 acres of aquatic and floodplain habitat and contributing significantly to our understanding of this complex system through monitoring and research. In addition to its achievements on the Upper Mississippi River System, UMRR and its monitoring and science element in particular has served as a model for other aquatic ecosystem restoration and monitoring efforts both nationally and internationally. Our states are extremely supportive of the UMRR program and its collaborative approach to restoration and monitoring. We will be joining the many UMRR program partners in La Crosse, Wisconsin this evening to commemorate the program's 30 years of accomplishments and I know that you will be hearing more about UMRR later in the inspection tour.
4. In the 2008 Upper Mississippi River Comprehensive Plan report, the Corps determined that a system of federal levee raises would not be economically justifiable, but it did recommend federal, state, and local actions that would greatly improve the preparedness, performance, and resiliency of flood risk management approaches. Section 4010 of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Water Resources Development Act of 2016 would authorize an additional flood risk study on the UMRS. Our states favor a slightly different approach: a watershed study aimed at developing tools (such as a unified HEC-RAS model) to enhance the information available for flood risk reduction and channel maintenance management, and creating a framework for proactive citizen engagement to achieve consensus on potential projects or recommended actions. The states are also interested in analyzing how other efforts occurring in the watershed (such as nutrient reduction, ecosystem restoration, flood risk management, etc.) might also be structured to optimize flood risk reduction and channel maintenance needs.

Thank you for your time this morning. We look forward to continuing to discuss these issues with you as you travel down the Upper Mississippi and hear from citizens all along the river. The Association and its five member States value our relationship with the Commission and the Corps, and we are always open and eager to find new ways to build upon and enhance our longstanding partnership.

Submitted by: *Dru Buntin*



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