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Comments to the Mississippi River Commission from UMIMRA Board Member Jim Koeller

General Wehr and Commissioners, thank you for meeting with us here today. We appreciate this open forum to discuss ideas and goals for the Mississippi Valley.

I stand before you today on behalf of the Upper Mississippi, Illinois, and Missouri Rivers Association, UMIMRA, an organization of more than 200 members in three states. I have lived and farmed my entire life in New Canton, IL along the Mississippi River just south of Hannibal. I fully acknowledge the opportunities and discomforts that this mighty river provides. One thing we know: Flood Control works and systemic flood control works better. In the Upper Mississippi, we are seeing more frequent flood events. In the Quincy-Hannibal area, eight of the top 10 floods of record have occurred since 1993. We are not alone in our concern for more frequent high water and we join levee districts and municipalities in 13 states in this resolution that calls for full funding of the MR&T and the implementation of the Upper Mississippi River Comprehensive Plan. These systemic flood control plans will save lives, property, and ensure the economic vitality of the Mississippi River Valley.

General Wehr, UMIMRA appreciates your commitment to working with the Upper Mississippi to decipher roadblocks, hurdles, and opportunities for the Upper Mississippi River Comprehensive Plan to succeed. There are three main issues that need to be addressed: Where will the water go? Who will pay for the improvements? And how will we implement?

The first question is probably the most difficult. Where will the water go? The Corps has already done a tremendous amount of work modeling and running different scenarios. This is very technical work and not easily understood, but we want to make sure that we have all 144 districts of the Upper Mississippi on the same page so that we can come to a consensus. While we are still in the initial stages, we propose having a meeting with a delegate from each levee district to attend with USACE officials, including General Wehr to discuss our options and eventually vote on a plan that will govern the Upper Mississippi River Comprehensive Plan. Our goal is that the Comp Plan will continue to evolve with updated science and modeling and that these delegate meetings would continue to involve stakeholders to the fullest extent possible in partnership with Corps officials. We are aiming for an initial delegate meeting in August during this Commission's tour of the Upper Mississippi.

The next question is: Who will fund it? Often when people go to DC, they are asking for funding. However, the levee districts of the Upper Valley are asking for permission and a road map, promising that we the stakeholders will put up the capital to make these systemic investments. We believe there could be no better example of a "public private partnership" and ~~we are working with Corps headquarters experts on the subject.~~

How will we implement? We need continued leadership from this Commission and the Corps to carry our message that a systemic flood control plan for the Upper Valley is both possible and essential. This plan is a national issue. I think most, if not everyone on this vessel understands the importance of the river to our national economy, so I will not belabor the point. But we need a broader acknowledgement of the importance of flood control to that economic vitality. ~~While we understand from the Corps that we do not need more authorization for the Comp Plan, we do need more priority placed on helping local stakeholders implement this systemic plan.~~ We ask the Mississippi River Commission to take a leadership role in the Upper Mississippi to treat the River as one system, with a clear plan on how to handle major floods, like the 1993 Flood, with minimal property damage and no loss of life.

UMIMRA stands ready to help find and implement the flood reduction solution for the valley. The time for action is now. Thank you ~~for your time.~~

Jim Koelzer
4-11-16