

December 16, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Re: St. Johns Bayou and New Madrid Floodway Project

Dear President Obama:

The 90 undersigned conservation organizations appreciate this Administration's strong commitment to protecting wetlands and conserving wildlife, as demonstrated by release of the vitally important proposed Clean Water Protection rule which our organizations strongly support. On behalf of our millions of members and supporters across the country, we ask you to take an essential step towards achieving those objectives by putting a stop to the wasteful and environmentally destructive St. Johns Bayou-New Madrid Floodway project proposed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This project is virtually identical to an earlier proposal that was thrown out by the U.S. District Court, and should be vetoed under section 404(c) of the Clean Water Act.

First dreamt up more than 60 years ago, the project will cut off the last remaining area where the Mississippi River connects to its backwater floodplain in the state of Missouri. The project will drain an area of wetlands larger than the District of Columbia and eliminate the vital fish and wildlife habitat created when the river regularly spreads out into this floodplain area. The Environmental Protection Agency and other resource agencies have properly concluded that this will cause substantial and irretrievable losses of nationally significant fish and wildlife resources and aquatic ecosystems.

This \$165 million project will increase – not decrease – flood risks in the region by promoting more intensive agricultural development in an area that, by law, must be intentionally flooded to protect Cairo, Illinois and other towns during large Mississippi River floods. This will lead to increased flood damages in the Floodway itself, and will make it even more difficult to activate the New Madrid Floodway in a timely manner. Delays in activating the floodway in 2011 have been implicated in the disastrous flooding of Olive Branch, Illinois. Though touted as providing protection for East Prairie, Missouri, the Corps' own analysis shows that the project will not reduce flooding frequency in East Prairie. Small scale, low impact solutions are available to reduce flooding in East Prairie and should be pursued in a separate process.

The Environmental Protection Agency and Fish and Wildlife Service have opposed this project for nearly two decades because it will cause significant harm to fish and wildlife that cannot be mitigated, a view shared by many of the country's most distinguished river and wetland scientists. The Missouri Department of Conservation opposes the project for the same reasons. Local community leaders oppose the project because it will make it more difficult to protect towns like Cairo from catastrophic floods. More than 20,000 members of the public have already joined the conservation community in calling for a Clean Water Act section 404(c) veto of the project.

We ask you to stop this flawed project that will waste \$165 million taxpayer dollars to benefit a small group of landowners at the expense of the environment, public safety, and resiliency to climate change.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director
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