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# Fact Sheet

## **EPA Should Veto the St. Johns Bayou New Madrid Floodway Project** *Project "is a horrible idea" that should be killed by EPA – St. Louis Post-Dispatch Editorial Board*

The \$165 million St. Johns-New Madrid project would cut off the last remaining area where the Mississippi River connects to its backwater floodplain in the state of Missouri. A massive new levee and enormous pumping plants would **destroy** an area of wetlands larger than the District of Columbia, **eliminate** the most important backwater fisheries habitat in the Middle Mississippi River, and **threaten** the safety of river communities. The purpose of this project is to allow intensified use of a vital flood protection area, the New Madrid Floodway. The Corps of Engineers is poised to recommend construction even though its own leadership has called the project an "economic dud" with "huge environmental consequences."

### **Experts Agree: Devastating for Wildlife and the Environment**

The project would cut the Mississippi River off from its natural backwater floodplain, destroying more than 50,000 acres of wetlands, an area larger than the District of Columbia. EPA should use its Clean Water Act authority to stop this extraordinarily damaging project.

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:** This project "would cause substantial, irretrievable losses of nationally significant fish and wildlife resources, and greatly diminish rare and unique habitats found in southeast Missouri."

**Environmental Protection Agency:** This project would "cause the greatest loss of wetlands function in EPA Region 7's history" and "significant impacts to the area's aquatic ecosystems" including "significantly altering fish and wildlife resources of regional and national importance."



*Federally endangered Least Terns nest in the Floodway  
Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*



*New Madrid Floodway. Photo: Ted Heisel*

**Department of the Interior:** This project would degrade or eliminate up to 53,556 acres of wetlands, and create "a suite of complex and unsolvable challenges in providing adequate mitigation for the wetland, fishery, and floodplain impacts."

**Missouri Department of Conservation:** The "New Madrid Floodway portion of the project should not be constructed" because the "loss of Mississippi River connectivity to the New Madrid Floodplain will result in significant impacts that cannot be addressed through mitigation."

**Independent Peer Review Scientists:** Loss of the last remaining connection between the Mississippi River and its floodplain in the state of Missouri and the ecosystem functions it provides "would be the 'straw that broke the camel's back'" for the river's long term health and sustainability.

## Leaders Agree: Increases Flood Risks for Communities

Dozens of elected officials and community leaders have called on the Administration to stop this dangerous project that will intensify development and agricultural use in the New Madrid Floodway. This will put dozens of river communities in Illinois, Missouri and Kentucky at risk by increasing the significant opposition to using the floodway in a timely manner to divert floodwaters during a severe flood.

As flood waters were rising in 2011, the state of Missouri sued the Corps to stop the floodway's use. The resulting delay led to the flooding of Olive Branch, Illinois, destroying 50 homes and causing millions of dollars in damage. Any further delay could have wiped out Cairo. Once the Floodway was used, water levels at Cairo dropped 2.7 feet in just 48 hours.



*Olive Branch, Illinois on May 2, 2011*

**Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL):** "The St. Johns Bayou New Madrid Floodway project could not be more at odds with the Clean Water Act and this Administration's commitment to wetlands protection, wildlife conservation, and modern flood risk management. I urge EPA to veto this project to protect the environment and the safety and well-being of Illinoisans."

**Congressman Mike Bost (R-IL-12):** I urge the Corps to make a "recommendation of no action" on the project because it "could further complicate the U.S. Army Corps decision-making on a potential future activation of the floodway, especially during rapidly unfolding emergencies like the Flood of 2011."

**Tyrone Coleman, Mayor of Cairo, IL:** "This project risks the lives and livelihoods of thousands to secure financial gains for a few. The Obama Administration needs to stop this project once and for all."

**David Willis, Chairman of the Len Small Levee and Drainage District, Olive Branch, IL:** "We could have saved an entire community and avoided millions of dollars in flood damages if the New Madrid floodway had been used earlier during the 2011 flood. We simply can't afford to make it even harder to use the floodway in the future."

**Richard Grigsby, President, Alexander/Pulaski Branch NAACP, IL:** "This is a civil rights issue. The federal government is proposing to spend \$165 million taxpayer dollars to put largely African-American communities at risk. The Obama Administration needs to veto this wasteful and unjust project."

## Economists Agree: A Bad Investment for Taxpayers

Despite decades of trying, the Corps has not been able to demonstrate that the \$165 million project is a good investment for taxpayers. The Corps' economic analysis lacks critical and fundamental information, is based on flawed and unsupportable assumptions, and is rife with inconsistencies and math errors.



**Donald C. Sweeney II, Ph.D., former Corps economist and Affiliate Professor of Economics at the University of Missouri-St. Louis:** The Corps' "economic analysis should be considered unreliable and insufficient to determine whether or not the recommended alternative, or any other alternative for that matter, will likely produce a positive net economic return for taxpayers' investments."

*The rare swamp rabbit, a species of concern, is found in the Floodway. Photo: Missouri Department of Conservation*