MRCTI

Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative

2018 Federal Policy Platform of the Mayors along the Mississippi River

Recovery, Resilience, and the Pursuit to Conserve and Restore the Nation's most Valuable Waterway

Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative

2018 Policy Platform
Capitol Meeting

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The Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI) is an association of United States Mayors in ten states along the main stem Mississippi River from headwaters to the Gulf of Mexico. All members of MRCTI are U.S. mayors. All content of MRCTI publications is congruent to MRCTI policy as adopted pursuant to association bylaws by the Co-Chairs and Executive Committee of the association.

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Executive Summary

Resilience, Recovery, and Restoration of our Waterway

It is our privilege to present the MRCTI Policy Platform for 2018 to our national leaders and regional stakeholders. *This platform has been developed to direct national resources toward the ecological restoration and job development of the Mississippi River Corridor with specific priority given to improving water quality, sustainability, and resilience of both our natural and built infrastructure*.

Our Association is comprised of both dense urban areas and distinct rural communities whose economies depend on one another for growth and opportunity. Our strength is rooted in our diverse roster of 84 cities and towns whose populations span from a few hundred to a few million. The deep and capacious currents of our waterway mirror the equally meaningful historical and cultural undertows of our region creating a resplendent national treasure that is the Mississippi River Valley—which we are privileged to call home.

This platform of ten appropriation priorities and ten authorization priorities addresses the acute shocks and chronic stresses our region has sustained over the last several years totaling more than $200 billion in actual losses since 2005, $50 billion since 2011, and over $10 billion since 2016. Key to our recovery is a focus on both our natural and built infrastructure which is the physicality of our economy – it is the platform upon which our markets and jobs are based.

The Mississippi River is the linchpin of our nation's domestic freight and water infrastructure. The waterway transports more than 60 percent of America's corn and soybean exports and 40 percent of the nation's total agricultural output. The River also drains all or a portion of 31 states providing billions of dollars in natural flow regulation services annually. On the Mississippi River Main Stem, the River's ecology provides 80 billion gallons of fresh water withdraws to industries as well as drinking water to 20 million people in 50 cities.

According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce the waterways and ports of the ten-state Mississippi River Corridor alone provide over 500,000 jobs generating $83.6 billion in annual revenue. The natural infrastructure provided by the River ecology provides one of the most important resources to our manufacturing economy – clean fresh water. The natural infrastructure of the Mississippi River Delta on its own provides $12 to $47 billion in benefits to the economy annually.

Yet, all of this economy is at risk due to both costly natural and built infrastructure decay. Infrastructure failures on the Mississippi River lead to closures costing the nation over $300 million per day. And, of the ten states along the River, three of them are in the top five for inland waterways; and Louisiana ranks first in ports. Resources are needed to avoid imminent failures. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), our inland waterways require an additional $37 billion in investment, while water infrastructure needs of the ten-state corridor are above $91.4 billion.

Therefore, the Mayors of the Mississippi River present this $7.5 billion *infrastructure investment and policy strategy* that supports eight major economies, creates over 140,000 jobs, and generates more than $22.5 billion in economic activity.

The Mississippi River is America's most essential inland waterway because it is the world's most agriculturally productive basin and the largest navigable system with the greatest trade footprint of any river in the western hemisphere. The Mississippi River generates nearly $500 billion in annual revenue and directly supports 1.5 million jobs. What follows here is the Mayors' recommendation of federal programs to support and strengthen that will achieve considerable return to the American tax payer if given to built and natural infrastructure renewal.

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Appropriation Priorities

Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies

~ Emergency Watershed Protection Program, $157 million
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service

Energy & Water

~ Mississippi River Civil Works Operations & Maintenance, $710 million
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

~ Mississippi River Infrastructure Rehabilitation, $1.5 billion
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

~ Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program/UMRR, $1.033 billion
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Homeland Security

~ Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program, $100 million
Federal Emergency Management Agency

Interior, Environment, & Related Agencies

~ Five Star & Urban Waters Restoration Grant Program, $30 million
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

~ Section 319 Water Pollution Control Grants, $200 million
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

~ USGS Water Resources Program, $238 million
U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Geological Survey

~ Drinking Water/Clean Water State Revolving Loan Funds, $3.0 billion
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Transportation, HUD, & Related Agencies

~ America's Marine Highway Grant Program, $10 million
U.S. Department of Transportation

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Farm Bill Priorities

~ Retain current target of 10 million new acres each year, and increase the average payment rate to incentivize high-level conservation for CSP;

~ Retain current funding for Environmental Quality Incentives Prog. (EQIP); but, increase beginning and socially disadvantaged farmer set-asides from 5 to 15 percent within both EQIP and CSP;

~ Increase funding for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) to $500 million per year to address growing demand;

~ Reserve at least 40 percent of CRP acres for CCRP, including Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) contracts; as well as increase cap on CRP acre pool from 24 million acres to 40 million acres.

Water Resources Development Act Priorities

~ Include a Lower Mississippi River Habitat Restoration Feasibility Study in WRDA 2018 to reduce disaster impacts and increase regional resilience.

Infrastructure Plan Recommendations

~ Provide for new revenue to implement a national infrastructure strategy;

~ The *infrastructure incentives program* should include evaluation criteria on the incorporation of natural infrastructure; and the rural performance grant program should require State RIIPs include resilience capacities in disaster prone areas;

~ An *infrastructure incentive grant* should be set above 20% of raised revenue;

~ Establish a mechanism by which environmental enhancement and restoration projects assisting built infrastructure be given priority agency review;

~ Protect human health and safety by retaining full review procedures that shield public lands, our water, and our air from unintended consequences.

Agriculture, Rural Development & Related Agencies

Emergency Watershed Protection Program……$157 million
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service

Background:
Through the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps communities address watershed impairments that pose imminent threats to lives and property. If land has suffered damage due to flood, fire, drought, windstorm, or other natural occurrence, EWP is designed to assist in the natural recovery of that land.

EWP program addresses watershed impairments, which include, but are not limited to:
- Debris-clogged stream channels;
- Undermined and unstable streambanks;
- Jeopardized water control structures and public infrastructures;
- Wind-borne debris removal; and
- Damaged upland sites stripped of protective vegetation by fire or drought.

Floodplain easements for restoring, protecting, maintaining, and enhancing the functions and values of floodplains, including associated wetlands and riparian areas, are available through EWP. These easements also help conserve fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, flood water retention, and ground water recharge, as well as safeguard lives and property from floods, drought, and erosion.

The Issue:
Mayors are more concerned with mitigating for the next disaster to control costs and continued deterioration of natural infrastructure which harms the economy. Mayors need programs that don't concentrate on bringing the landscape back to the state it was before the disaster, but improving resilience and immediately addressing vulnerabilities that exacerbate impacts.

The Emergency Watershed Protection Program meets all our characteristics for restoring our natural infrastructure making it more resilient for persistent and unprecedented impacts. Counties which meet most or all census track thresholds for EWP are situated along the Mississippi River main stem from the border of Iowa and Missouri to Baton Rouge, LA comprising over half of the River's entire length. EWP has only been funded one time in the life of the program at $157 million leaving just $2.4 million for FY 2016 and FY 2017.

Therefore, Mayors of MRCTI urge Congress to allocate $157 million in new funding to EWP so that crucial funds will be available to address and reduce the cost of more frequent disasters.

Energy & Water

Mississippi River Civil Works Ops & Maintenance……..$710 million
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Mississippi River Infrastructure Rehabilitation……..$1.5 billion
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Background:
The Army Corps of Engineers' Civil Works program budget funds the Mississippi Valley Division civil works program, which manages critical activities needed to reduce the risk of flood impacts in River communities, facilitate economically vital waterborne transportation, restore significant aquatic ecosystems, generate low-cost renewable hydropower, and support the River region's jobs.

The Issue:
However, despite the critically-important nature of such projects, the Army Corps of Engineers' Civil Works programs are consistently cut. A funding level of $2.21 billion for the Corps' Mississippi River civil works activities specifically ($710 million for operations/maintenance as well as MR&T and $1.5 billion for 29 locks and dams along the waterway) will allow the Corps to bring essential infrastructure out of a state of compromise and provide dimensions for the channel that allow freight to use said infrastructure unhindered.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors urge Congress to oppose cuts to and support the maintenance of the Army Corps of Engineers' Civil Works program budget at a funding level of $2.21 billion for Mississippi Valley Division civil works program specifically.

Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Prog/UMRR……$1.033 billion
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Background:
The Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP) is a long-term plan of navigation improvements and ecological restoration that benefits the entire inland waterway system.

NESP aims to reduce commercial traffic delays while restoring, protecting, and enhancing the environment. NESP implements an integrated, dual-purpose plan that progresses toward economic and environmental sustainability of the River. NESP can advantageously build from the existing Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program (UMRR, $33 million); and then, UMRR can help ensure continuous benefits after NESP's 15-year duration has completed.

As authorized by Congress, NESP includes $1.948 billion in navigation improvements and $256 million for targeted, cost-effective efficiency measures while at the same time providing for $1.717 billion toward a 15-year ecosystem restoration program that includes an additional $10.42 million annually for critical monitoring.

The Issue:
The domestic movement of materials and commodities is pivotal to our nation's economy and the Mississippi River's built and natural infrastructure contribute to that obligation beyond any inland waterway. Yet, lock outages have increased 700 percent nationally over the past decade and ecosystem degradation has played a significant role in exacerbating disaster impacts. There is a cost-effective program ready to address these issues if implemented as authorized.

- *Equipping the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with the data needed*: The feasibility study for NESP, which was approved by the chief of engineers and authorized by Congress, outlines specific incremental steps for navigation efficiency; the first one being to complete construction and implementation of non-structural and targeted measures. Following non-structural and efficiency measure implementation, economic and efficacy studies will guide future action on lock construction ensuring more public benefit and less government waste.
- *Providing for both built and natural infrastructure*: The NESP authority requires the Corps to spend near-equally towards ecosystem restoration and navigation improvements.
- *Facilitating long-term benefits*: The NESP feasibility study promises ongoing restoration funding beyond the life of navigation projects. For as long as navigation continues on the Mississippi River, restoration and monitoring programs will be necessary to protect the environmental services our economy depends on.

Therefore, Mayors urge Congress to fully fund NESP ensuring a 1) persistent support of our natural infrastructure: NESP promises nearly $2 billion for ecosystem restoration over the life of the program. This component is essential to our manufacturing, water supply, and tourism economies. Thus, it is imperative this work continue unhindered through the life of the program and beyond. 2) Efficient and tailored federal role: It is important Congress empower the Corps of Engineers to clarify new institutional arrangements with USGS and other partners to ensure there is no disruption in long-term monitoring and restoration as NESP is implemented.

Homeland Security

Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program……$100 million
Federal Emergency Management Agency

Background:
The Federal Emergency Management Agency's Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) program effectively reduces threats to Mississippi River Valley populations and structures at risk by funding preparation in advance of natural disasters, while also reducing the River region's reliance upon Federal post-disaster recovery funds. PDM provided over $70 million in pre-disaster planning and mitigation to 39 states and territories in 2011, saving money by investing in disaster preparation, when every dollar spent on disaster mitigation yielded four dollars in benefits. We applaud the Congress' renewed support for the value of PDM as a program that protects our communities and makes our economies more resilient.

The Administration's FY 2017 budget requested $54.48 million for PDM. This level represents nearly a fifty percent cut to the program's FY 2016 level. The Mississippi River Valley sustained an estimated $3 billion in damage from flooding that stretched from Grafton, IL to New Orleans, LA in late December 2015 and most of January 2016. Disaster impacts along the River continued throughout 2016 culminating in $10 billion in impacts around the Baton Rouge area in August.

The Issue:
There is a larger degree of disaster frequency creating unprecedented costs. Since the turn of the millennium, natural disasters have become more severe and more chronic in the United States increasing from typically 47 per year to 61 over the last decade, recently topping-out at 97 in 2011. Since 2005, the Mississippi River Valley has sustained successive 100, 200, and 500-year flood events, a 50-year drought, Hurricane Katrina, and Hurricane Isaac. The 2011 500-year flood effected multiple locations. Disasters along the Mississippi River have become persistent and systemic incurring over $50 billion in costs since 2011. Over the last ten years ten or more disaster declarations were designated in thirty states; six states have received twenty or more.

Thus, with such devastating weather events on-going, cutting PDM at this point will have the basic effect of canceling critical mitigation work before it even begins. Any infrastructure investment plan must include resources to protect the infrastructure that is repaired and augmented lest disaster impact costs double or as much as quadruple.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative Mayors call upon Congress and the Administration to preserve and fully fund the Federal Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program at $100 million for FY 2019. Further, Mayors urge the Federal Emergency Management Agency continue to allow and prioritize for multi-state applications so that state and local governments may meet impacts at the level they are occurring – the regional level. Disasters are not confined to man-made jurisdiction and thus resources are best deployed across jurisdictional lines.

Interior, Environment, & Related Agencies

Five Star & Urban Waters Restoration Grant Program……..$30 million
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Background:
Since 1999, the Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Grant Program has supported more than 885 projects, with more than $10.7 million in federal funds, $9.3 million in private and corporate contributions, and $72.2 million in matching funds at the local level. EPA has partnered with NFWF since the inception of the program, supporting community-based conservation and partnerships across the United States and its territories.

This program seeks to develop community capacity by providing assistance to diverse local partnerships for river, wetland, riparian, forest and coastal restoration, and wildlife conservation. Water monitoring, stormwater management, sourcewater protection, urban tree canopy restoration, and ventures designed to protect waterways from solid waste are types of projects that are awarded grants.

The grants are administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's (NFWF) Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Grant Program which supports projects that develop community stewardship of natural resources and address water quality issues. Support for the 2017 Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Program is provided by the Wildlife Habitat Council, and major funding by EPA, USDA-Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, FedEx, and Southern Company. More information about the grant program can be found on the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's website.

The Issue:
The funding levels for this program are extremely minuscule compared to the needs on the ground. According to the ASCE, the ten state Mississippi River Corridor is facing a $42.2 billion wastewater infrastructure deficit and a $49.1 billion drinking water infrastructure deficit. Rivers (mostly the Mississippi River), wetlands, riparian area, marshes, and urban forests all contribute to our water regulation and quality capabilities above and beyond our built infrastructure. An increase to the program from minuscule to modest funding level would allow for more designated project areas along rivers where major cities reside.

Complimenting the Urban Waters Program is the Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). LWCF allows for diverse spending on state and local government facilities, urban parks, and even private owners of forest land who want to voluntarily conserve their forests.

Therefore, the MRCTI Mayors call upon Congress to fund the Five Star Urban Waters Program at $30 million for FY 2019 and urge the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to designate more partnership areas giving priority to the rivers with the most major cities such as the Mississippi, Cedar, Illinois, Missouri, Ohio, and Arkansas rivers. Further, MRCTI Mayors urge Congress to allocate $400 million in discretionary funding and $500 million in permanent funding as part of a multi-year strategy leading to full permanent funding for the LWCF.

Section 319 Water Pollution Control Grants……$200 million
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Background:
EPA's Clean Water Act Section 319 Categorical State Grant Program provides grants (known as "Water Pollution Control Grants") to states for prevention and control measures that improve water quality. $164.92 million was enacted for FY 2016 for Clean Water Act Nonpoint Source (Section 319) Grant Program ($5.66 million over the FY 2015 enacted level). This spending is directed at state and tribal efforts designed to implement water pollution controls and strengthen nutrient control efforts consistent with EPA state nutrient reduction framework.

The Issue:
Section 319 Water Pollution Control Grants are the only grant within the EPA portfolio specifically intended to reduce non-point pollutants and toxins from entering waters of the U.S. The Mayors see nutrient loading as one of the most significant threats facing the water quality of the Mississippi River and all its aquatic systems that support cities' economies.

MRCTI has held discussions with stakeholders throughout the corridor to determine how mayors can play a valuable role in reducing nutrient loading into the Mississippi River. Out of the ten Mississippi River states, only Minnesota and Illinois have set both nutrient reduction goals and timelines. Two states have set reduction goals, but no timelines, and six states have neither. States have explained to us that budget constraints are one of the main causes for not pursuing nutrient reduction more directly. Funding is needed to deploy robust monitoring as well as conduct the research needed to set credible goals. Thus, mayors are working to see how they can help states secure more funding resources through the only non-point source grant program – 319. MRCTI's proposal pends on the approach that more revenue generated by our resources can be placed back into those resources to sustain the valuable environmental services they provide such as drinking water.

The proposed funding level for FY 2018 increases the spending for 319 grants as compared to the FY 2016 enacted level in order to begin meeting the needs of states for controlling the massive nutrient-intensive landscapes they are faced with managing. This resource assists state in securing the agricultural industry and aiding our manufacturing base because nutrients lost from the field to our rivers comprise a cost to farmers in nutrient replacement, and a cost to manufacturers and cities to clean the water before it can be used to power industry. The combined agriculture and manufacturing economies just in the 246 counties that comprise the Mississippi River corridor generate $422.6 billion. *Clean Water Grants Sustain our Agricultural Industry and Assist Manufacturing.*

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative Mayors ask Congress to fund the Section 319 Categorical State Grant Program's Water Pollution Control Grants at $200 million for FY 2019. Further, Mayors recommend the U.S. EPA partner with the Natural Resource Conservation Service within USDA to ensure state 319 Grants plans include nutrient reduction capacities at an influential level. This type of cross-agency collaboration on evaluating grant applications has precedent in the HUD administered Sustainable Communities Grant Program where multiple agencies advised on application viability on a number of performance metrics.

USGS Water Resources Program…….$238 million
U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Geological Survey

Background:
Nutrient loading and sediment transport and deposition are two critical water-quality issues in the Mississippi River Basin (MRB). These issues can affect drinking water supplies, aquatic ecosystem health, manufacturing, utilities, and navigation on the main-stem Mississippi River. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) operates the National Water Quality Network (NWQN) for Rivers and Streams to assess the status of – and changes in – water-quality conditions. New sensor technologies can continuously measure concentrations of nitrate and phosphate, and estimate suspended-sediment concentrations.

The proposed monitoring network will deliver near real-time estimates of nutrient and sediment concentrations and loads at key locations across the Mississippi River Basin (MRB). The data would be delivered using a state-of-the-art mapping and visualization website that would enable water managers, key stakeholders, and the public to track how nutrients and sediment move throughout the MRB, evaluate how effective agricultural management practices are at reducing nutrient and sediment contributions to large inland watersheds and the main-stem Mississippi River, and provide a significant ability to track the impacts of floods or contaminant spills on a near real-time basis.

The one-time cost to purchase and install the necessary sensors and infrastructure at the 54 monitoring sites is approximately $5M. Funds to operate and maintain the continuous sensors, add discrete water-quality sampling at selected sites to verify sensor data, and to analyze, quality-assure, and deliver information on a website would be about $6M per year.

The Issue:
Nutrient loading is one of the greatest threats to our business lines on the river because it compromises water quality, impedes manufacturing, and depresses the tourism and recreation industries that account for the second largest economy on the waterway. States are working to reduce nutrient loading into the watershed, but require robust monitoring to help them determine if their reduction practices are working at a regional scale. Hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent across the landscape on this issue blindly if there is not systemic monitoring in place to measure the effectiveness of nutrient reduction projects.

The previous Administration's FY 2017 budget called for $227 million for the USGS Water Resources Program. Adding $11 million to that figure will allow for deployment of a nutrient monitoring net as well as one year of sensor operation funding. $6 million being added to the USGS baseline budget will allow for ongoing operation of the sensors in outlying years. This support will allow for the measurement of nutrient reduction activity across at least ten states. *Real-Time Water Quality is Essential to Disaster Response, and Targeted Investment.*

Therefore, Mayors urge Congress to fund the USGS Water Resources Program at $238 million for FY 2018. Robust monitoring at this level will allow accurate measurement of infrastructure project effectiveness.

Drinking Water/Clean Water State Revolving Loan Funds…$3.0 billion
U.S. Department of Interior

Background:
The President's FY 2017 request proposed an increase to the Drinking Water SRF by almost twenty percent above the FY 2016 enacted level while at the same time reducing the Clean Water SRF by nearly 30 percent. The SRFs were funded at a combined level of $2.35 billion in FY 2015. The previous Administration's request represents a $350 million cut to the FY 2015 enacted level of spending.

The clean and drinking water state revolving loan funds have baseline comparisons available to measure the actual effectiveness of expenditures. States require estimates of pollutants removed before a project is approved as well as insist projects come with monitoring and evaluation components. The drinking water loan funds have consistently scored a positive return on investment. According to a 2009 report, for every dollar spent by Congress on DWSRF, a $1.82 was realized on the local end. For every dollar spent by states, a return of $5.50 was realized.

The Issue:
For every federal dollar of SRF spending, 21.4% is returned to the federal government in the form of taxes and on average, 16.5 jobs are created for every 1 million spent through SRF; each job is estimated to bring about $60,000 in labor income. Infrastructure investments create 16 percent more jobs than equivalent spending on a payroll tax holiday, 40 percent more jobs than an across-the-board tax cut, and more than five times as many jobs as temporary tax cuts.

Every million dollars of SRF spending results in $2.95 million of input in the U.S. economy. This is a smart investment complimenting a narrow federal role of ensuring modern, efficient infrastructure. Since this is a loan program, SRFs leverage resources from all levels of government and the private sector empowering state and local governments. SRFs are voluntary reducing regulatory burdens on businesses.

SRFs are an important investment tool as U.S. businesses will have lost $734 billion between the years 2012 and 2020 due to loss in sales and additional costs stemming from unreliable water infrastructure if current trends continue.

Twenty million people, fifty cities obtain their drinking water from the Mississippi River; the infrastructure makes possible these withdraws as well as those for manufacturing. SRF–funded infrastructure benefits millions, sustains our water delivery systems.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative Mayors ask Congress to provide $3.0 billion for the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds combined.

Transportation, HUD, & Related Agencies

America's Marine Highway Grant Program……..$10 million
U.S. Department of Transportation

Background:
Consisting of over 29,000 nautical miles of navigable waterways, America's Marine Highway System serves as an extension of the surface transportation system and promotes short sea transportation. Two Marine Highway System routes (the M-55 and M-35 Corridors) incorporate the Mississippi River. Those two corridors are vital components of the nation's inland waterway system and central to maintaining our ability to efficiently transport a significant portion of the region's agricultural and other commodity exports to the Gulf.

America's Marine Highway Program is a Department of Transportation-led program to expand the use of our Nation's navigable waterways and to relieve landside congestion by increasing the efficiency of the surface transportation system. The Program is administered by the Maritime Administration (MARAD), which collaborates with stakeholders from all transportation sectors to improve and strengthen the U.S. marine transportation system, including building a U.S. maritime system for the 21st Century.

In 2014, $1.7 trillion worth of U.S. goods moved through the nation's ports. The largest U.S. port ranked by tonnage is the Port of South Louisiana along the Mississippi River. Indeed, the nation's only trade surplus in agricultural goods is made possible by port infrastructure of the Mississippi. Waterways and ports of the ten-state Mississippi River Corridor alone provide over 500,000 jobs generating $83.6 billion in annual revenue.

The Issue:
Regardless of the infrastructure and economy described above, containerized freight, the most ubiquitous medium of freight movement, is almost non-existent on the nation's inland waterway system. Of the 30 million containers that came into the United States in 2014, almost none of them moved on the Mississippi River. Thanks to a broad public/private partnership brokered by the Mayors of the Mississippi River, Inland River Port & Terminal Association, and the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association container movement is returning to the River.

Our inland ports and waterways cannot be ignored and are essential to our economic future:
- Our population will grow from 319 million in 2014, to 400 million by 2051;
- The movement of freight is expected to increase by 40 percent over the next 30 years;
- As much as 10 percent of the cost of goods can be attributed to transportation costs.

Bottom line, there is not enough surface transportation infrastructure to accommodate projected growth in U.S. freight demand. *Inland port and waterway infrastructure is vital to U.S. economic competitiveness***.**

Therefore, MRCTI Mayors call upon Congress to support the Marine Highway Program by funding the grant account at $10 million.

Conservation Programs

Retain current target of 10 million new acres each year, and increase the average payment rate to incentivize high-level conservation for CSP;

Retain current funding for Environmental Quality Incentives Prog. (EQIP); but, increase beginning and socially disadvantaged farmer set-asides from 5 to 15 percent within both EQIP and CSP;

Increase funding for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) to $500 million per year to address growing demand;

Reserve at least 40 percent of CRP acres for CCRP, including Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) contracts; as well as increase cap on CRP acre pool from 24 million acres to 40 million acres.

Background:
The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Critical Conservation Area (CCA), and the Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) all comprise about six percent of total Farm Bill authorization and yet directly impact a landscape of 31 states effecting the source water for over 20 million people in 50 cities on the Mississippi alone.

Both EQIP and CSP have significant jurisdiction along the Mississippi River. For EQIP, six of the top 10 states are along the River (MS #2, AR #4, MN #7, WI #8, IA #9, MO #10, TN #11). For CSP, five of the top states were along the River (MN #1, MO #3, IA #4, WI #5, AR #7, IL #12).

The Issue:
With increased pressures on working lands to produce food, fuel and fiber for our nation and the world, a comprehensive, long-term Farm Bill and its conservation programs are needed now more than ever.

The Farm Bill's conservation programs are crucial to the health and viability of the Mississippi River Valley's agriculture and rural landscape. They help farmers, ranchers and foresters to voluntarily address their key resource concerns, and deliver demonstrated environmental benefits, including clean air and water, and abundant habitat for wildlife.

They protect soil and farmland to provide a consistent food, fuel, feed and fiber supply for future generations. And they bring important economic benefits and jobs to the Mississippi River region, including increased revenues from hunting, fishing and other recreational activities.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative Mayors call upon Congress and the Administration to pass and enact a full five-year Farm Bill this year that..

Supports a Robust and Effective Farm Bill Conservation Program

- Sustain the integrity and effectiveness of the Conservation Title of the bill in continuing what is a longstanding and successful partnership between the Federal government and America's farmers and ranchers to protect our nation's and the Mississippi River Valley's exceptional soil, water and wildlife resources;

- Maintain conservation funding at adequate levels, to meet our national and regional needs including increasing funding for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) to $500 million per year to address growing demand

Provides a Reasonably Priced Farm Safety Net Linked to Sound Farm Stewardship

- Provide farmers with a needed safety net that works more effectively, and gives them access to tools that help them be good stewards of our natural resources by increasing beginning and socially disadvantaged farmer (including veteran and minority farmers) set-asides from 5 to 15 percent within both EQIP and CSP;

- Renew and extend conservation compliance to all income support programs, including retention of the current target of 10 million new acres each year, and increase the average payment rate to incentivize high-level conservation for CSP;

- Reserve at least 40 percent of CRP acres for CCRP, including Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) contracts; as well as increase cap on CRP acre pool from 24 million acres to 40 million acres without compromising support for water quality protection and enhancement.

Supports Urban Agriculture and Green Space While Protecting Rural Natural Areas

- Allow cities to participate in and receive funding from the Conservation Stewardship Program. Protect valued prairie and grasslands that play critical roles in reducing soil erosion, improving water quality, and enhancing wildlife habitat by establishing a nationwide "sodsaver" program.

Include a Lower Mississippi River Habitat Restoration Feasibility Study in WRDA 2018 to reduce disaster impacts and increase regional resilience

Background:
Congress authorized the Lower Mississippi River Resource Assessment to examine river management information, habitat, and recreation; identify needs for each of these; and make recommendations for meeting those needs. Upon completion of the assessment, three programs were recommended to address the needs on the river. Each of these programs includes multiple studies and projects. The Lower Mississippi River Habitat Restoration Feasibility Study will provide a blueprint through which programs recommended by the assessment may be implemented. The recommendations leverage existing programs and encourage both public and private investment in the river. All recommendations are compatible with navigation and flood risk management.

The recommended Habitat Restoration and Management Program would support restoration of river reaches, numerous individual aquatic habitat restoration projects, terrestrial habitat restoration, and invasive species management. This program would primarily rely on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee with their cooperating agencies, partners and states – Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The program would benefit a variety of habitats and the species that rely on them, recreational users, local economies, and other river resources.

The Issue:
The ecology of the Mississippi River supports the recreation, tourism, water supply, navigation, agricultural, and manufacturing economies of the waterway. Clean water and healthy environmental systems throughout the River's corridor are the keys to creating a sustainable and resilient economy. A thriving ecology holds water in the system creating reliability for navigation; it buffers and protects critical infrastructure from storm events; it improves water quality thus reducing the cost of manufacturing; it provides irrigation for agriculture; and most importantly, it secures drinking water for fifty cities comprised of over 20 million people. The combined revenue of these economies on the southern stem is $136.5 billion employing more than 527,000 people.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors call upon Congress and the Administration to pass an updated WRDA in 2018 that includes a Lower Mississippi River Habitat Restoration Feasibility Study with a $1 million authorization per year for three years.

Provide for new revenue to implement a national infrastructure strategy

- The current infrastructure plan assumes a leveraging rate of 47 times the initial federal investment which almost doubles the leveraging rate of some of the best performing federal accounts today. Further, the plan also currently assumes localities should habitually be able to generate four times the investment from non-federal sources to match grants proposed in the plan when typical federal match requirements today are 25 to 50 percent;

- Though there may be some projects that do possess revenue streams that could perhaps perform at the ratios imagined by the plan, those projects will be the disparate exception rather than anything remotely routine;

- More importantly, however, when facing a multi-trillion-dollar infrastructure shortfall for the nation and a multi-billion deficit in the Mississippi River Valley alone, only $200 billion in federal investment coupled with aspirational collateral proportions is simply not enough to address critical infrastructure that is beyond its design life and in a state of compromise.

Therefore, the Mayors of MRCTI strongly recommend new revenue be identified to support the tremendous infrastructure investment needed across eight economic sectors. Whether this revenue be from an adjusted gas tax or repurposed Department of Defense spending, our infrastructure is in too much a deteriorated state for any plan to be funded simply by cutting other domestic programs, some of which already fund infrastructure needs.

The infrastructure incentives program should include evaluation criteria on the incorporation of natural infrastructure; and the rural performance grant program should require State RIIPs include resilience capacities in disaster prone areas

- Page 4 of the White House Plan describes the criteria by which applications for resources from the infrastructure incentives program should be evaluated. However, since mitigation expenditures return up to $6.00 for every $1.00 invested, it is compelling for resilience and mitigation to be an evaluation criterion for grant applicants;

- We further recommend that projects incorporating resilience and mitigation capacities by use of natural infrastructure already in place or to be restored, should receive priority consideration from the agency as this will reduce the risk of investment and decrease maintenance costs;

- These same considerations can be applied to the state Rural Infrastructure Investment Plans as required by the White House proposal on page 9 especially for disaster-prone areas such as near-water communities.

Therefore, the Mayors of MRCTI recommend that any legislation developed from the White House Infrastructure Plan include resilience, mitigation, adaptation, and sustainability capacities in the grant application criteria to ensure infrastructure investments withstand persistent and increased disaster impacts being experienced throughout the Valley since 2005.

An infrastructure incentive grant should be set well above 20% of raised revenue

- On page 7 of the White House Plan it states an incentive grant cannot exceed 20 percent of new revenue. This low percent share from the grant severely limits resources that could be secured from the program great reducing the incentive for private capital to pour into projects which seemed to be the overall objective of the plan in the first place.

Therefore, the Mayors of MRCTI recommend that the infrastructure incentive grant be set at least more than twice the recommended percent level of revenue raised by the project. This higher share will both motivate increased private sector investment and ensure that those portions of projects not covered by revenue streams (typically 80 percent for most infrastructure projects) can be allocated more funds.

Establish a mechanism by which environmental enhancement and restoration projects assisting built infrastructure be given priority agency review

- If an aim of the White House Plan is to make extensive portions of the environmental review process more efficient as stated on page 35, then we recommend listing a method by which federal agencies could give review priority to those infrastructure projects designed to restore, enhance, and augment environmental services.

Therefore, the Mayors of MRCTI recommend that infrastructure projects which include provisions that complement their design purpose with natural infrastructure enhancements, restoration, or augmentation be moved to the head of the que for environmental reviews conducted by applicable agencies.

Protect human health and safety by retaining full review procedures that shield public lands, our water, and our air from unintended consequences

- Page 42 of the Plan outlines several efficiency measures applied to the Clean Water Act. Congress should keep whole all CWA provisions especially when addressing crucial water protection permitting procedures such as the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES);

- Congress should retain the authority to approve energy pipelines crossing lands administered by the National Park Service (page 47 of White House Plan) in order to reduce the chances of an environmental catastrophe. Some studies have found that it can take up to 90 days for significant seepage from energy pipelines to be detected leaving our surface water and ground water resources vulnerable. Further, energy pipelines carrying tar sand crude do so at a temperature up to 158◦F which can lead to serious impacts in the event of a rupture;

- Page 48 of the Plan discusses expansion of the NEPA assignment program to include other determinations such as flood plain protections. Expanding the assignment program to states for issues related to flood plain protection should only be pursued in instances where the state wishes to maintain or expand protections of a flood plain by prohibiting built structures or by removing structures that already exist;

- Page 49 of the Plan considers alternatives to the NEPA review process termed "negotiated mitigation agreements." This approach may have unintended consequences and become, in effect, a way to disrupt the protections for which NEPA was intended to promulgate.

Therefore, the Mayors of MRCTI recommend that any alterations to natural resource reviews provided by law not sacrifice human health and safety or the integrity of critical environmental services for the sake of project efficiencies. Compromising ecosystem benefits may ultimately render an infrastructure project more expensive due to its unintended deleterious effect on water security and/or natural protections to disasters.