For Immediate Release
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Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative Annual Meeting Mayors Make Major Announcements:

Disaster Preparedness Request, Clean Water Alliance with Walmart Stores, Inc., and River Economy Partnership with U.S. Dept. of Transportation

September 14, 2016 – Natchez, MS – Mayors from more than 20 cities along the Mississippi River are gathered this week for the fifth annual meeting of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI).

Disaster Preparedness
The Mississippi River has sustained significant storm impact since the start of 2016.

"Cape Girardeau, MO has seen an all-time high flood level. Three-fourths of Mississippi was impacted by flood water effecting 12 million people," explained Mayor Errick Simmons of Greenville, MS.

But, it's not just flooding. Minnesota heat indices climbed above100 degrees at the end of July. We've had over 45,000 homes damaged or destroyed in Louisiana since March," said Mayor Richard Lee of Port Allen, LA just across the River from Baton Rouge, LA.

MRCTI mayors, today, asked FEMA to improve their process for the application of disaster resources. According to Mayor Richard Lee of Port Allen, LA, "We need to make it easier for states and cities to treat climate impacts with disaster mitigation resources as they occur – at the regional level." MRCTI recommends that FEMA make updates to the program and allow for broader multi-state projects to meet climate change at the scale it is happening – throughout the ten-state corridor.

Clean Water Alliance with Walmart Stores, Inc.
"Mayors of MRCTI consider clean water a top priority because more than 20 million people and 50 cities drink the surface water of the Mississippi River. Also, the top three economies on the Mississippi are Manufacturing, tourism, and agriculture generating $366 billion in annual revenue directly supporting over 1.1 million jobs. These three economies depend on one vital resource – clean fresh water." said Mayor Dave Kleis, Mayor of St. Cloud, MN and MRCTI Executive Committee member representing MN.

MRCTI announced that it has found an ideal collaborator who shares its priority of achieving clean water in the Mississippi River. Walmart Stores, Inc. has agreed to an alliance with MRCTI in this work.

According to Mayor Dave Kleis, "One of the greatest threats to our water is nutrient loading. Our cities want to make a difference in reducing the amount of nutrients flowing into our water. We found that procurement requirements around the food cities purchase for city facilities, programs, and events could send a signal to the marketplace that controlling for nutrient pollution in the supply chain is important."

We also learned that Walmart is interested in the link between nutrient retention practices and food products as well and has begun to strongly encourage suppliers participate in better nutrient management.

MRCTI has agreed to promote nutrient reduction practices through the development of procurement directives that prioritize nutrient reduction. Further, MRCTI will encourage food-suppliers operating throughout the Mississippi River Basin to develop nutrient management plans pointing to Walmart's Fertilizer Optimization Initiative as a best practice with a goal of publicly recognizing a unique supplier for each of the ten Mississippi River border-states.

In answer to this, "Walmart will continue its work on nutrient reduction while launching an alliance with MRCTI. To- date, Walmart has worked with 17 suppliers in its agriculture supply chain to engage 23 million acres in best practices and measurement and reporting for nutrient management. We plan to continue to support farmers and their communities improving livelihoods, productivity and water quality. The MRCTI alliance is an exciting opportunity to promote nutrient reduction in food procurement practices across the 10 Mississippi River basin states. "Walmart will work with MRCTI to expand acreage participating in nutrient optimization within the Mississippi River Basin, including areas using cover crops, crop rotation and other optimization practices," explained Brittni Furrow, Sr. Director of Global Sustainability for Walmart Stores, Inc.

Sustainable Economic Development

"Returning container movement to the waterway has been a priority of our association. Waterways and ports in my state support over 280,000 jobs and contribute $47.7 billion to Louisiana's economy," stated Mayor Belinda Constant, Mayor of Gretna, LA and Co-Chair of MRCTI.

"MRCTI mayors have worked to restore the Marine Highway Grant program with U.S. DOT which was funded this year for the first time since 2007. We are very excited to announce this work has paid off. Containers are moving on the Mississippi River again through a line managed by SCF Marine and U.S. Maritime Administrator, Paul "Chip" Jaenichen is announcing new container-on-barge projects," said Mayor Constant.

Administrator Jaenichen announced contain-on-barge projects for the Ports of New Orleans, Memphis, Baton Rouge, and the St. Louis area.

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The Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative is comprised of 75 mayors and the association represents cities on the main stem Mississippi from Minnesota to Louisiana. More information can be found on our website at www.MRCTI.org