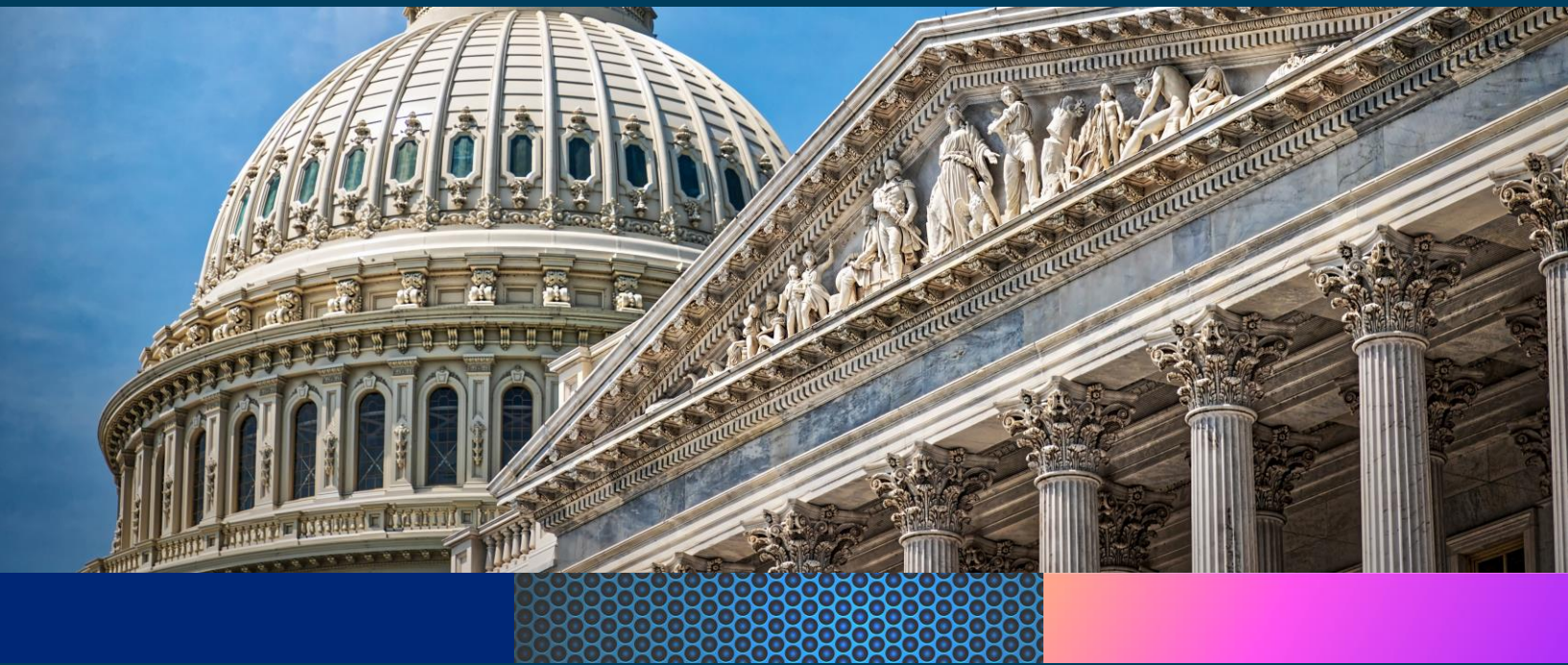


Mississippi River Cities & Towns 2024 Federal Policy Platform



A Plan That Scales-Up Bold Ambitions to Protect and Restore the World's Most Important Working Riverine Region

MRCTI MRCTI CAPITOL MEETING
WASHINGTON, DC, MARCH 6-8, 2024

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER,
OUR CONNECTION
IS NATURAL



Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative 2024 Policy Platform

A Scaled-Up, Bold, and Ambitious Plan for Middle America



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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 currently serving 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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Introduction

Preparing for the Next Half of the IJA and IRA

We present this Federal Policy Platform for 2024 to our national leaders and regional stakeholders. *This is a scaled-up, bold, and ambitious plan to protect and restore the world's most important riverine region.*

Submission of this platform marks the half-way point of the Bi-Partisan Infrastructure Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. Already, the Mississippi River Corridor has seen \$146 billion in new investment.

105 Cities Securing Our Nation's Most Important Corridor Our Corridor is a national treasure of ecosystem services vital to our nation's economic security and critical to commodity production, manufacturing, and transportation. Nearly \$1 trillion of product moves on the Mississippi River annually. The Mississippi River Basin produces 92 percent of United States agricultural exports and makes possible over \$400 billion worth of fresh-water-dependent manufacturing.

The IJA and IRA Function Best If Supported By Strong Policy The Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act have the potential to fund transformative projects to completion throughout America. However, this historic funding must be backed and supported by smart policy as well as process and implementation spending for certain critical related programs; and that is exactly the aim of the *platform* we present here for 2024.

Addressing Multiple Hazards, Deploying Co-Benefit Projects The Mayors of the Mississippi River present this platform incorporating resilience, climate mitigation, ecosystem restoration, recycling infrastructure, conservation, co-benefit projects, and water security. This plan is designed to complement the Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act spending with policy and support program funding that will ensure a more effective IJA and IRA.

What follows here are eight major policy recommendations together with seven appropriation priorities to comprise our platform for 2024. As a stakeholder in this work, we hope you can join us in supporting this plan.

Appropriation Priorities in brief

Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration

Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative \$50 million
U.S. Department of Agriculture, NRCS

Energy and Water Development, & Related Agencies

Lower Mississippi River Demonstration Program \$40 million
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Interior, Environment, & Related Agencies

North American Wetlands Conservation Fund \$55 million
U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

EPA Categorical Grant: Wetlands \$15 million
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Program \$30 million
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Homeland Security

Permanent Solution for Saltwater Intrusion \$5 billion
U.S. Department of Homeland Security, FEMA

Transportation, HUD, & Related Agencies

America's Marine Highway Program \$12 million
U.S. Department of Transportation, Maritime Administration

Priorities in brief

Farm Bill Reauthorization

The Farm Bill was last passed in 2018, and is an integral part of how the United States manages agriculture, conservation, and nutrition programs in the United States. The Farm Bill will affect every community along the Mississippi River regardless of size as well as greatly impacting the commerce on the waterway.

Andrew J. Young Safeguarding the Mississippi River Together (SMRT) Act

The Andrew J. Young Safeguarding the Mississippi River Together (SMRT) Act is an innovative approach that will improve federal coordination, improve infrastructure, support innovative approaches to remove nutrients, and support a thriving economy on the Mississippi River.

National Coordination on Adaptation and Resilience for Security Act (NCARS)

NCARS fills a vital hole in the current federal government portfolio by providing better coordination between federal departments. Developing a strategy to deal with resilience on the federal level will ensure taxpayer dollars are spent more efficiently.

The Facilitating Hazard Mitigations Projects Act

Senator Bill Cassidy and Senator Gary Peters introduced bipartisan legislation that would require the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to simplify its requirements for demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of hazard mitigation grants.

The Healthy Farms Healthy Watersheds Act

The Healthy Farms Healthy Watersheds Act of 2023 provides a new strategy to make federal investments more effective by focusing Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) resources.

Shelter Act

Despite hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars spent on disaster recovery each year, there are currently no federal tax incentives to encourage mitigation. The Shelter Act allows Americans to write off 25 percent of qualifying mitigation expenses, from strengthening the durability of a roof to elevating a housing unit to reduce potential flood damage.

Recycling Infrastructure and Accessibility Act

This bill requires the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to establish a pilot grant program for improving recycling accessibility in communities. The EPA may award grants to states, local governments, Indian tribes, or public-private partnerships.

Mississippi River Basin Fishery Commission Act

There is no federally recognized interstate body or federal legislation to support cooperative fisheries management for the entirety of the 31-state Mississippi River Basin. The Mississippi River Basin Fishery Commission Act addresses this problem.

Appropriation Priorities



“The Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative is a good program but it needs dedicated annual funding.”

-Hon. Jorge Prince, Mayor of Bemidji, MN

Agriculture, Rural Development & Related Agencies

Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative.....\$50 million U.S. Department of Agriculture
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Background:

Launched in 2009, the 12-state MRBI uses several Farm Bill programs, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), to help landowners conserve America’s natural resources through voluntary conservation. The overall goals of MRBI are to improve water quality, restore wetlands and enhance wildlife habitat while ensuring economic viability of agricultural lands.

Issue— Scale-up Priority

The MRBI and other lateral funded NRCS initiatives continue to lag behind the climate impacts across the Mississippi River Basin. The Corridor, alone, has sustained over \$246 billion in actual losses from droughts, floods, extreme heat, and named storms since 2005. Though, MRBI has the potential and the backlog to deploy natural infrastructure capacity to systemically mitigate multi-billion-dollar effects from climate change, the project portfolio on the ground continues to be asymmetrical in design and low-yield when compared to the challenge at hand.

The Mayors have been working toward five objectives in this regard that closely tracks with MRBI outcomes: 1) move as much federal and state funding from response and recovery to resilience, mitigation, and restoration; 2) Rely more heavily on natural infrastructure assets such as wetlands, marshes, forests, and reconnected floodplain to absorb risk at corridor scale for collections of cities; 3) Develop advanced partnerships between cities and non-government entities to deploy a suite of natural and built infrastructure assets; 4) Support projects with ecological and economic co-benefits that augment the reliability of environmental and city services at local and regional scales; 5) Create a quantum shift in public and private spending on resilience prioritizing for vulnerable communities building economy with climate performance.

Therefore, the Mayors of MRCTI urge Congress to create line-item funding for the MRBI and direct USDA to allocate \$50 million from Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) toward that effort. The \$50 million in new funding for MRBI can be used to develop partnerships and projects on the ground that more systemically improve the regenerative capacity of agricultural lands, the enhancement of environmental services that sustain agriculture production and freshwater sources for drinking and manufacturing, as well as natural infrastructure to reduce disaster effects.

Congress should increase the EQIP program mandatory funding by \$50 million to create new capacity for this MRBI enhancement and prioritization.

Energy and Water Development, & Related Agencies

Lower Mississippi River Demonstration Program\$40 million U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Background:

Congressional passage of the Lower Mississippi River Demonstration Program (Section 406) is part of H.R. 7776, the Water Resources Development Act of 2022 [contained in the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023]. This bill provides \$40 million for systemic living resource restoration efforts on the Lower Mississippi River. A historic victory and achievement for the lower Mississippi River.

This new program will help the Army Corps of Engineers to restore ecosystems in the Lower Mississippi River. A vital step to provide extra flood capacity to protect our communities, helping clean the water, increase outdoor recreation, aid in wildlife habitat, and alleviate drought conditions. This program is needed more than ever, particularly after the historic drought on the Mississippi River last year.

Issue:

The need for ecosystem restoration particularly on the lower Mississippi River is vitally needed. Enhancement, conservation, and restoration of our living resources and ecological services on the lower river are exactly what our cities and economy need. The lower river in particular is emerging from one of the most expensive and impactful droughts in the last thirty years crippling the supply chain and damaging infrastructure. The projects called for by this new program will help our cities become more disaster resilient.

Specifically, MRCTI and Ducks Unlimited have been working together to deploy tens of thousands of acres of natural infrastructure involving 8 states and 30 cities to achieve disaster resilience through restoration and conservation. This program will greatly assist this innovative partnership.

Therefore, the Mayors urge that Congress direct \$40 million be spent under the Lower Mississippi River Demonstration Program in FY2025. This historic program enacts a major priority of the Mayors' Safeguarding the Mississippi River Together, or SMRT Act.

Interior, Environment, & Related Agencies

North American Wetlands Conservation Fund	\$55 million
U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	

EPA Categorical Grant: Wetlands	\$15 million
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	

Background:

Wetlands are a complex ecosystem that provides a myriad of services and benefits to near-water communities including water quality improvement, pollution control, flood protection, fisheries, recreation, and commercial harvests of rice, reeds, and hay. For instance, a single wetland can remove the same amount of pollutants as a \$5 million treatment plant without the adjoining energy, maintenance, and capital costs as the built equivalent. It is difficult to overstate the benefits of wetlands due to their efficient water regulating capacity.

The North American Wetlands Conservation Fund (WCF) assists local government agencies in building programs to protect, manage and restore wetlands. States and local governments are eligible to apply for financial resources out of the WCF providing a 50 percent match. The Fund provides applicants with some opportunity to develop and refine comprehensive state, local government wetland programs.

The Wetland Grants at the EPA assist state, tribal, local government, and interstate/intertribal entities. The program specifically funds monitoring and assessment, regulatory activities, restoration and protection, and Water Quality Standards for Wetlands.

The Issue:

The Upper Mississippi River Basin has lost over 80 percent, or 64 million acres of wetlands since the close of the 18th century leaving our region exposed to disasters that would normally be absorbed by wetland capabilities. A single wetland acre can store as much as one million gallons of water. Collectively, wetlands provide several hundred million dollars in water flow and regulatory services annually.

Further, outdoor recreation and tourism comprise the second-largest economy on the Mississippi River supporting a sport fishing industry that generates several billion dollars in annual revenue. Up to 90 percent of recreational fish catch depends on wetlands for an essential portion of the life cycle. On the terrestrial side, half of all North American bird species nest or feed in wetlands, and the Mississippi River Valley is home to the largest most populated migratory flyway in the continent supporting a multi-billion bird and large game economy.

Therefore, the MRCTI Mayors call upon Congress to support the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund at \$55 million for FY 2025, this would be slightly elevated funding. In tandem with the WCF allocation, MRCTI mayors also request that \$15 million be allocated for the EPA's Categorical Grant program for Wetlands, this would be roughly \$300,000 over the amount allocated in FY2023.

Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Program.....\$30 million U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
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Background:

The Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Program focuses on the stewardship and restoration of coastal, wetland, and riparian ecosystems across the country. The goal of the program is to meet the conservation needs of important species and habitats, providing measurable and meaningful conservation and educational outcomes. The program encourages the cooperation of diverse partnerships, which includes an important education and outreach component that will encourage the behavior to achieve conservation goals.

The Mississippi River and the entire basin are in real need of both coastal wetlands to protect Louisiana from the threat of hurricanes, as well as riparian projects across the basin to mitigate the impacts of persistent and escalating climate disasters. The entire basin requires wetland restoration to absorb the flood waters and extreme precipitation events that are becoming more common. Riparian areas can catch nutrient loading, and reduce sedimentation and erosion. These valuable natural solutions will not only clean the water that flows down the Mississippi River but provide the additional flood storage capacity to protect our communities in the most efficient and affordable way possible. These natural assets will be much more cost-effective to build and maintain when provided a larger ecosystem restoration footprint.

The Issue – Scale-up Priority

Since 1999, the Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Program has supported more than 1,000 projects through more than \$14.3 million in federal funding and \$12.4 million in private and corporate funding. These grants have leveraged \$85 million in matching contributions. It is anticipated that those projects will engage more than 1.7 million community members across the country in conservation efforts and restore approximately 66,000 acres of land and wetlands.

In 2023, the MRCTI kicked-off its urban tributary restoration campaign with a profiling of critical restoration opportunities and this program can help. This low-cost under-utilized program can leverage large amounts of matching funds from communities as well as engage the larger community to learn about and become more active in conservation. This creates new assets that have a large amount of community buy-in. At a relatively low investment, this program has been shown to provide immense returns to the taxpayer.

Therefore, the Mayors urge Congress to increase the allocation for this program at \$30 million year-over-year to meet the more regional-scale threats to our urban water environmental systems. The Urban Waters Program is another example of a federal spending line where larger, more comprehensive projects are possible but rarely realized due to lack of funding and an outdated directive of allocating only micro-grants to micro-areas whose overall impact will be negligible given the scale of climate impacts we are experiencing.

Homeland Security

Permanent Solution for Saltwater Intrusion\$5 billion US Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency
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Background:

For the past two years, the Mississippi River has struggled on and off with drought for the last two years. This has caused major issues that threaten the water supply for many citizens in southern Louisiana and caused major investment from the Army Corps of Engineers to protect the water supply for well over a million people.

With the numerous predictions of sea level rise, as well as larger fluctuation in weather patterns the only way to solve this issue will be long-term solutions for this problem. Saltwater will continue to creep up the Mississippi River and threaten the drinking water for all these communities in Southern Louisiana. This is a slow-moving disaster that could prove to be a tragic disaster if not dealt with quickly.

Issue:

Many communities south of Baton Rouge get their drinking water from the Mississippi River. These systems are set up to treat freshwater and not saltwater, once saltwater gets into the system it will make it much harder to filter the water, and the people in southern Louisiana will not be able to get fresh water from their water utility. Further, the saltwater will corrode and destroy the pipes.

The Army Corps of Engineers has further spent large amounts of federal funding to create an underwater saltwater still, create a large pipe to bring fresh water to New Orleans and the greater area, and barge water to communities to mix fresh water and saltwater. Further, these solutions are set up to be temporary, meaning these are set to be discontinued and reconstructed as needed. Finding permanent solutions now for these problems will save the taxpayer in the long run, while allowing this critical transportation corridor to remain open and unaffected.

We would also like to note that mixing fresh water from barges and saltwater is far from an ideal solution. This mixture is still difficult for many water treatment facilities and may cause premature failure, which could cause an additional disaster. We have seen catastrophic problems in Flint and Jackson and the problems they cause, creating long-term solutions will avoid these problems. Continuing to provide these temporary solutions will be costly and will likely result in a preventable crisis.

Therefore, MRCTI Mayors call upon Congress to fund a permanent solution to Salt Water Intrusion by providing permanent solutions for our cities beyond the state of the emergency. We recommend Congress provide \$5 billion to begin the process of converting many of these facilities to handle desalinization and to examine and implement the best option for New Orleans be it a permanent fresh water line or a saltwater treatment.

Transportation, HUD, & Related Agencies

America's Marine Highway Program.....\$12 million US Department of Transportation, Maritime Administration

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.

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 29 million containers that came into the United States in 2018, 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 329 million in 2019, to 438 million by 2050;
- 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 are vital to U.S. economic competitiveness.

Therefore, MRCTI Mayors call upon Congress to support the Marine Highway Program by funding the grant account at \$12 million, just \$2 million above the FY 2023 enacted level.



“There is now bipartisan support for better managing the Mississippi River at watershed scale.”

-Hon. Sharon Weston Broome, Mayor of Baton Rouge, LA

Farm Bill Reauthorization

House Committee on Agriculture

Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

Background:

The current Farm Bill was last passed in 2018. This vehicle is an integral part of how the United States manages agriculture, conservation, and nutrition programs. The bill also addresses rural development, water security, environmental services sustainability, resilience, as well as the manufacturing and tourism industries. The Farm Bill will affect every community along the Mississippi River regardless of size as well as the global commodity supply chain.

MRCTI Priorities for Reauthorization in 2024:

- Begin deploying conservation measures and performance for the added priority of mitigating for disaster impacts that are now at \$246 billion in actual losses since 2005 along the Mississippi Corridor;
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) - we support allowing for flexibility in addressing local and regional resource challenges, including groundwater sustainability, drought relief, resilience, and preparedness. MRCTI is calling for a gradual shift to EQIP priorities by elevating disaster mitigation outcomes, making non-profits and cities eligible partners, pursuing solutions to multiple hazards including droughts and intense heat, as well as broadening the scale of projects such as MRBI;
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) - Increase the maximum number of acres by 1.5 million a year for the next five years. This increase should include the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program minimum enrolled acres elevating by 0.4 million acres for each of the next five fiscal years;
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) - Ensure CSP is more accessible and better facilitates desired on-acreage outcomes for farmers by increasing the five-year cap to contracted amounts to \$250,000;

Farm Bill authorization priorities continued:

- Rural Development Program— Rural development should also target Broadband programs prioritizing resources for rural communities most in need of connectivity. It should also provide increased access and incentives to afford safe and adequate childcare in rural communities.
- Provide substantive funding increases for sustainable and organic agriculture systems that can sequester carbon, improve nutrient cycling, and lower fossil fuel energy inputs;
- Strengthen Local Food Systems by developing new and improved infrastructure to allow producers to aggregate, process and distribute products in local communities. This includes utilizing USDA’s food procurement policies to support competitive, distributed, and resilient local and regional food systems. We should also increase access to fresh local food through nutrition programs;
- Promote conservation and eliminate barriers to sustainable and organic farming practices through practices such as linking premium subsidies to stewardship practices that protect our land, water and health;
- Drought Resilience—In the 2013 Farm Bill, MRCTI worked with partners to include a National Drought Council which would work across the federal family to develop comprehensive national drought resilience policy. This council was ultimately taken-up by NOAA and used to assemble drought risk management technologies and tools. Today, significant gaps remain and consequently, the nation still does not have comprehensive policy on building resilience to drought. The Mayors of MRCTI therefore urge Congress use the 2023 Farm Bill reauthorization to begin filling drought policy gaps. Congress can make a significant start by calling on entities such as the Drought Resilience Interagency Working Group, National Drought Resilience Partnership, Council on Environmental Quality, and the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) to create clear lines of communication and coordination.

Further, Congress should direct drought resilience organizations within the federal family to begin assembling a drought resilience action plan that works toward the following:

- ✓ Award federal disaster declarations to states for drought;
- ✓ Allow cities to spend FEMA funds addressing drought impacts;
- ✓ Make drought mitigation a spending priority for Jobs Act grants;
- ✓ Develop national incentives for manufacturers to build-out water recycling;
- ✓ Allow for more adaptive multi-watershed management at basin scale;
- ✓ Allow farmers and land owners to be compensated for voluntarily rotating acreage out of irrigation to alleviate drought;
- ✓ Make agricultural credits for climate mitigation available under TITLE II, Subtitle C of the Inflation Reduction Act eligible for drought resilience activities.

Safeguarding the Mississippi River Together Act

H.R. 4729 (in 117th Congress)

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Senate Committee on Environment & Public Works

Congressman Bennie Thompson (MS) introduced H.R. 4729, the Andrew J. Young Safeguarding the Mississippi River Together Act (SMRT Act) for the purpose of sustaining one of the nation's most important natural resources relying on and expanding authority enacted via the 2014 Water Resources Development Act. The Mayors are fully supportive of the Andrew J. Young SMRT Act and request that the bill language be placed in the Water Resources Development Act.

The SMRT Act creates the Following Organs

- 1) *Federal Leadership Committee* comprised of critical federal agencies, one governor, and one Mayor to coordinate and advise on federal mobilization to carry out the Act.
- 2) *National Mississippi River Program Office* to develop and implement a Comprehensive Mississippi River Restoration Plan as well as studies and investigations called for under the Act.
- 3) *Comprehensive Mississippi River Restoration Plan* assembled and managed by the Mississippi River Program Office, this plan will set-out a ten-state strategy to restore at scale the critical national assets of the entire Mississippi River Corridor.

The SMRT Act Establishes the Following Grants and Studies

- 1) Infrastructure Repair, Resilience, and Adaptation Grant to repair, replace, or restore critical natural and built infrastructure assets that have sustained considerable damage due to repetitive loss events through spending lines for planning, resilience, and build-back-better activities.
- 2) Sustainable Economic Development Grant to allow communities to shift their economies from costly industrial base to clean manufacturing, commodity movement, and/or tourism.
- 3) State Sedimentation and Errand Nutrient Assistance Grant for states to pursue nutrient reduction strategies more aggressively in the form of planning, innovative achievement of nutrient reduction goals such as nutrient trading, capitalization for best technology, support of on-field sustainable agriculture practices and the development of new markets for cover crops.
- 4) Mississippi River Corridor Economic Profile updated every five years to profile the regional economic activity dependent upon the Mississippi Corridor.
- 5) Watershed Monitoring Network calls for the development of a Water quality and flow monitoring network for the Mississippi River Valley.
- 6) Disaster Resilience and Environmental Services Valuation provides data, research, and investigation that offers economic impact of all MVD ecosystem restoration work in terms of disaster resilience and enhanced environmental services to be made part of the MVD's cost benefit analysis.
- 7) Trust Fund Feasibility Study to determine the feasibility of establishing a multi-user-fee-supported trust fund for the Mississippi River's ecological sustainability and built infrastructure integrity and repair.



Appropriations and ROI

The SMRT Act authorizes up to \$500 million per year for five years to fund activities prescribed. Since funding resilience can generate a return of up to \$12.00 for every \$1.00 invested and the environmental services of the corridor produce nearly \$500 billion in annual revenue for the nation as well as billions of dollars more in water regulation and production services the actual cost projected for this Act is close to 0.1 percent of the return if benefits remain unchanged.

Permeable Margins of Jurisdiction and Authority

The Mississippi River Corridor is vast with many interests and players; thus, a multi-lateral approach is necessary to have an impact on climate, resilience, and economic security. This legislation works to address issues outside traditional silos and cross links original authorities among agencies so intergovernmental, inter-economic, and interdisciplinary sciences are essential.

Timelines Arranged

- 1) 120 days after enactment, the EPA Administrator in concurrence with the Department of the Interior shall establish a narrowly tailored temporary version of the National Program Office to immediately assist and coordinate the early activities of the Secretary and the Federal Leadership Committee until a permanent version may be developed in the Mississippi River region.
- 2) 6 months after enactment, the Administrator shall invite proposals from the ten states along the Mississippi River to host the National Mississippi River Program Office.
- 3) 6 months after the Administrator invites proposals from the ten states along the Mississippi River to host the National Mississippi River Program Office, states' responses are due to be submitted to the Administrator.
- 4) 9 months after enactment, the Federal Leadership Committee shall prepare and publish a broad strategy for coordinated implementation of existing programs and projects to guide efforts to protect and restore the Mississippi River Corridor.
- 5) 2.5 years after enactment, the National Program Office shall develop a comprehensive Mississippi River Restoration Plan.
- 6) 3 years after enactment, the Trust Fund Feasibility Study shall be reported to Congress.
- 7) Every 5 years after enactment, the Program Office shall update to the Economic Profile.
- 8) Every year after the publishing of the Comprehensive Mississippi River Restoration Plan, at least one project must be carried out as prescribed by the Act.

From Corridor to Basin Effect

This legislation is designed to set the stage for management of the Mississippi River region from corridor (10 states) to basin (31 states) scale over time as the intent, inquiry, and approach are perfected starting with the activities described in the SMRT Act.

National Coordination on Adaptation and Resilience for Security Act (NCARS)

H.R. 6311 and S.3261

House Committee on Energy and Commerce

Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Background:

The devastating flooding on the Mississippi River cost over \$20 billion in 2019 alone. Disaster mitigation is crucial to prevent the costs associated with disaster recovery. Every dollar spent by the federal government on disaster mitigation has proven itself to save \$6.00 to \$12.00 for every dollar spent on post-disaster recovery. This is why the Mayors have long advocated for a whole of government approach to improve how disaster resilience is managed across the federal government.

The bipartisan National Coordination on Adaptation and Resilience for Security Act (H.R. 6311 and S.3161) was introduced to develop a unified federal plan and increase federal coordination to increase the resilience of frontline communities in the United States. The NCARS Act would also require an Implementation Plan to ensure the Strategy is effectively translated into improved and streamlined federal adaptation operations.

The Issue:

Under NCARS, the federal government will develop a whole-of-government national climate adaptation strategy and implementation plan. This plan will be updated every three years and inform future strategies that are developed. NCARS will also create a Chief Resilience Officer position at the White House, this is a position that numerous states have already implemented and will help to focus the federal government.

NCARS will also support the establishment of up to five interagency resilience Working Groups and a non-federal Partners Council to assist with the production of the Strategy and strengthen lines of communication about resilience between federal agencies, state government, local government, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. These steps will minimize redundancies across agencies and improve the ability of the federal government to implement resilience initiatives, particularly as many new resources are becoming available at the federal level.

Therefore, the Mayors urge Congress to pass the National Coordination on Adaptation and Resilience for Security Act as soon as possible to help communities like ours on the Mississippi River to improve their resilience to natural disasters. We recommend that \$2,000,000 be made available each year through fiscal 2032 to fulfill the need under this strategy.

Facilitating Hazard Mitigation Projects Act

S. 3067

House Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Background:

FEMA currently requires applicants to perform a benefit-cost analysis (BCA) to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of their projects hazard mitigation funding from FEMA. This process is incredibly cumbersome for many local governments, particularly those that are small and disadvantaged. Some of our communities have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to perform such analysis and had to go back and perform these numerous times after an initial award of the grant. Making hazard mitigation funding difficult for the communities that need this funding the most.

Senator Bill Cassidy and Senator Gary Peters introduced bipartisan legislation that would require the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to simplify its requirements for demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of hazard mitigation grants. The Facilitating Hazard Mitigations Projects Act would require FEMA to develop strategies for reducing the complexity of its cost-effectiveness requirements for hazard mitigation grants, and provide a report to Congress on how it is implementing those potential strategies.

Issue:

Extensive applicant feedback has shown that the current BCA process is cumbersome and overly complicated, which puts underserved communities at a disadvantage for accessing funds. Hazard mitigation grant funds can be used for projects that reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and property from natural hazards.

This legislation also requires FEMA to consult with states and local government as it performs its evaluation on how to improve this BCA process. FEMA would also still be required to ensure grants are cost-effective and meet all other grant eligibility requirements.

With changes to programs like Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC), that has the potential to provide large scale resources to communities. Changes to the BCA is necessary to ensure that small and disadvantaged communities can take advantage of this funding and protect their communities. The BCA is currently serving as a gate keeper making this funding impenetrable for many communities. Improving this process will greatly improve these programs and resilience around the nation.

Therefore, the Mayors are in full support of the Facilitating Hazard Mitigation Projects Act as it will improve delivery of the multiple FEMA hazard mitigation programs. The bill does not have any direct costs, as it can be done with current resources provided to the department.

The Healthy Farms Healthy Watersheds Act

H.R. 6821

House Committee on Agriculture

Background:

Harmful algal blooms (HABs) adversely affect water quality in all 50 states, resulting in harming human health, hindering tourism and regional economies, and sinking property values and waterfront business. In 2019, the year of the longest lasting recorded flood on the Mississippi River resulted in major algae blooms along much of the gulf coast considerably hampering the economy that relied on tourism as well as fishing.

Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur (OH-09), and Congressman Mike Gallagher (WI-08) introduced the Healthy Farms Healthy Watersheds Act of 2023, a bipartisan, budget-neutral bill to support efficacy in voluntary nutrient runoff management programs that fight harmful algal blooms. Despite federal agencies spending billions of dollars assisting farmers and producers in adopting management practices to improve water quality, HABs persist across all 50 states, including in significant water bodies such as the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay.

Issue:

The Healthy Farms Healthy Watersheds Act of 2023 provides a new strategy to make federal investments more effective by focusing Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) resources on one of the most critical drivers of HABs – dissolved reactive phosphorus (DRP). Concentrating efforts in priority watersheds focuses valuable attention and resources on areas where DRP reduction has the highest potential to improve water quality. This increases the likelihood of success in reducing the frequency and extent of harmful algal blooms throughout the US.

The bill establishes a pilot program under NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The pilot strategically focuses existing NRCS conservation programs on minimizing DRP in federally recognized "priority watersheds." These small, sub-watersheds in critical conservation areas have been identified as areas where DRP reduction has the greatest potential to improve water quality.

NRCS will prepare and implement action plans for priority watersheds. Each plan will maximize DRP reduction in the priority watershed for fiscal years 2025 through 2031 and include localized implementation goals paired with an adaptive management plan to flexibly implement the work. Plans also require a blueprint to enhance outreach to eligible partners and producers.

Therefore, the Mayors are in support of the Healthy Farms Healthy Watersheds Act. However, the bill fails to name the Mississippi River, although it mentions the Great Lakes and the Chesapeake Bay. The bill should be amended to include the Mississippi River and its tributaries, as it is the nation's largest and most important waterway.

Shelter Act

H.R. 4305 and S. 2106

House Committee on Ways and Means

Senate Committee on Finance

Background:

Despite hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars spent on disaster recovery each year, there are currently no federal tax incentives to encourage mitigation. The Shelter Act allows Americans to write off 25 percent of qualifying mitigation expenses, from strengthening the durability of a roof to elevating a housing unit to reduce potential flood damage.

The tax credit has an annual limit of up to \$5,000 per taxpayer. Eligible properties include homes or businesses in or adjacent to an area that the federal government has declared a disaster within the past 10 years. Taxpayers who rent a property in eligible areas can also receive the credit. The credit begins to phase down for households that earn more than \$168,000 for joint filers and phases out entirely for households that earn more than \$250,000. For businesses, the credit begins to phase down when a business earns \$5 million and phases out completely when its revenue is more than \$10 million.

Issue:

In recent years, natural disasters have increased in severity and frequency across the nation and will only become even more costly and catastrophic as the climate changes. Strategic investments in resilient infrastructure and hazard mitigation save lives, dramatically reduce the devastation caused by disasters, reduce the costs of disaster recovery efforts, and help affected communities recover more quickly. Resilient infrastructure also strengthens regional economies - research has shown that every \$1 billion spent on flood resilient infrastructure can create 40,000 jobs.

The Mississippi River has seen numerous natural disasters over the last 5 years alone, including historically high-water levels in 2019 and historically low water level in 2022. Additionally, with hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards, record sudden rainfalls, and numerous other natural disasters have also devastated communities along the Mississippi River. Putting resources into mitigation measures have shown to save our country hundreds of millions of dollars. More importantly, these resources will save homes, lives, and businesses.

Therefore, the Mayors are in full support of the Shelter Act as it is a crucial piece of legislation that will incentivize homeowners and businesses to become more resilient, as resilience has been shown to save money when done early, we believe over the long term this bill will save federal dollars that would have otherwise been spent on recovery.

Recycling Infrastructure and Accessibility Act

H.R. 6159 and S. 1189

House Committee on Energy and Commerce

Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works

Background:

In September 2018, Mississippi River Mayors announced a commitment with state legislators to reduce plastic waste. At least 80 percent (80%) of the plastic in our oceans comes from land-based sources. The Mississippi River drains an expansive 31-state landscape; thus, it becomes clear that possibly 40 percent (40%) of plastics in the Gulf originate from the Mississippi Basin.

Specifically, MRCTI is working with UN Environment, the University of Georgia, Louisiana State University, U.S. EPA, the Nation of Canada, Clean Memphis, the City of St. Louis and over 100 other partners over 15 cities to muster a full-river waste audit so Mayors can learn what products account for the majority of plastic waste, where, impacting what, at what severity.

Additionally, the MRCTI campaign is informing participating cities on how to better manage their storm water to reduce plastic and floatable waste outflows to the Mississippi River and consequently, the Gulf of Mexico.

Issue:

The Recycling Infrastructure and Accessibility Act would establish a pilot recycling program at the EPA. This program would award grants on a competitive basis to eligible entities for improving recycling accessibility in a community or communities within the same geographic area. The goal of the program is to fund eligible projects that would significantly improve access to recycling systems in underserved communities.

Therefore, the Mayors urge passage of the Recycling Infrastructure and Accessibility Act to provide our Mayors with new recycling infrastructure.

Mississippi River Basin Fishery Commission Act

Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works

Background:

The Mississippi River and its tributaries comprise one of the largest and most valuable ecosystems in the world. The Basin supports vibrant and diverse recreational sporting activities and commercial fisheries. Economic output from recreational fishing in the Basin in 2011 exceeded \$19 billion (USFWS unpublished data).

The Mississippi River Basin is the fourth-largest watershed in the world and the largest in the nation. The watershed drains all or part of 31 states and 2 Canadian provinces. The Basin covers more than 1.2 million square miles, approximately 41% of the continental U.S., and has nearly 1.5 million miles of waterways. There are more than 100 interjurisdictional rivers in the Basin that flow between or through two or more governmental agencies, and at least 90 fish species in the Mississippi River Basin that can come under interjurisdictional management.

Issue:

Habitat degradation, AIS, and the multiplicity of aquatic management authorities complicate and threaten the supply and utilization of these stocks. The economic threat from invasive carps to the recreational and commercial boating and fishing industries, as well as local and regional economies, cannot be overstated.

Aquatic invasive species (AIS), particularly invasive carps, quagga mussels, and zebra mussels, have become major issues impacting large river fishery resources in most Basin states and are placing increasing strain on agency resources for coordinated management and control efforts.

Despite the economic, ecologic, and social importance of interjurisdictional fishery resources in the Mississippi River Basin, and the complexity of managing sustainable recreational and commercial fisheries with the multiplicity of resource management authorities, there is no federally recognized interstate body or federal legislation to support cooperative fisheries management for the entirety of the Basin.

The Mississippi River Basin Fishery Commission Act would provide a formal structure within the 31 states of the Mississippi River Basin to provide increased interagency, interstate, and inter-basin coordination and collaboration necessary for long-term sustainable management and utilization of interjurisdictional fishery resources in the Mississippi River and its tributaries.

Therefore: the Mayors of MRCTI agree that a Mississippi River Basin Fishery Commission is urgently needed for improved cooperative, interagency management of interjurisdictional fishery resources, including to better coordinate and direct basin wide efforts of state and federal agencies in the fight against invasive carp to improve the effectiveness of federal investments in the Basin. MRCTI Mayors urge passage of the Mississippi River Basin Fishery Commission Act.

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Co-Chair

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