Mississippi River Mayors detailed unprecedented coordination among cities to address historic flooding on the waterway. Mayors held three press conferences on the flooding this January. Cape Girardeau Missouri Mayor Harry Rediger joined U.S. Senator Blunt of Missouri on January 1. Mayors Walker of Alton, IL; Rediger of Cape Girardeau, MO; and Brown of New Madrid, MO conducted a press call on January 4. Mississippi and Louisiana mayors gathered in Vicksburg, MS on January 8 as part of their joint response efforts.

“This flood continues to set records for the month of January as well as all-time records in some areas,” explained Vicksburg Mayor George Flaggs.

Flooding on the Mississippi has extended from Grafton, IL north of St. Louis to Memphis, TN and is expected to continue all the way to New Orleans.

The Mississippi river crested at its third highest level on record in St. Louis and set a new record in Cape Girardeau, MO. Eleven levees have experienced breaches thus far. Critical infrastructure and homes have been impacted in multiple states including water treatment plants.

“This River is incredibly important to our cities, to our economies, to our quality of life. It provides critical environmental services such as drinking water. We find ourselves in a new normal that requires we adapt to increasing frequency of storm events” said Mayor Copeland of Vidalia, LA and MRCTI co-chair.

The City of Alton, IL alone has experienced the third, fifth, and tenth largest floods in the City’s history over the last two years. The 2011 flood was classified as a 500-year event in some areas. The 2015-16 flood is reaching just a few feet below those marks.

The Mayors also announced they have made valuable progress in securing funds to prepare for future storm events making the Mississippi River Valley more resilient to disasters. Working with members of the Mississippi River Caucus in the U.S. House and Senate, the Mayors have realized a 3-year goal of renewed funding for the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program of $100 million in the spending bill passed by Congress in December. MRCTI mayors will now pursue a coordinated approach to bringing as much of this grant funding to the region as possible toward building resilience into the Mississippi River Valley.
Mayors Hold Talks With River Basins Across the World

Mayors of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative presented the results of their talks with food-producing river basins of the world to achieve climate resilience, protection of source water, and food security on Dec 8 in the U.S. Center in Paris during the U.N. Climate Meeting (COP 21).

The MRCTI delegation to Paris included Mayor Chris Coleman of St. Paul, MN; Dave Kleis of St. Cloud, MN; Roy Buol of Dubuque, IA; and Larry Brown of Natchez, MS.

See the Presentation On-Line

Presentation – Results of Global River Talks at COP 21
MRCTI’s presentation in Paris can be viewed on the U.S. State Department channel at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-qdjI3TALs
Mayors Forge Food Security Agreement Among 15 Nations

A mayoral delegation representing the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI) announced an international agreement to mitigate climate impact to the world’s food and freshwater supply, during COP 21—the United Nations Climate Change meeting held in Paris. In pursuit of an agreement, the mayors, in partnership with the UN Environment Program, the International Network of Basin Organizations, the International Society for River Science, and ecoAmerica, held a series of global river talks, meeting with representatives from food-producing river basins during COP 21.

“One of the greatest climate change threats to the world is a dramatic alteration to our food supply and decrease of freshwater. Since the Mississippi River basin tops the list in food production, we saw the development of an international sustainability agreement imperative to saving river basins—including ours—from climate change and major population growth,” said Mayor Chris Coleman, St. Paul, MN and MRCTI Co-Chair. “This agreement provides a watershed moment for the world’s waterways.”

In addition to Mayor Coleman, MRCTI mayors included Mayor Roy Buol, Dubuque, IA, Mayor Dave Kleis, St. Cloud, MN, Mayor Larry ’Butch’ Brown, Natchez, MS, and Mayor Mitch Landrieu of New Orleans, LA. St. Louis-based MRCTI is a mayoral-led effort comprised of 68 River Mayors committed to creating a coordinated voice for the Mississippi River.

MRCTI and its partners developed the agreement in cooperation with the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO) in response to climate commitments made this week to INBO’s Paris Pact on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change. The agreement was signed by the network of river basin organizations [as well as the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine. MRCTI will move the agreement forward and work to secure more signatories.

The agreement seeks to “protect surface and ground waters to ensure food security and access to drinking water” and contains a number of action items around developing a water quantity and quality program. Among these are: developing a robust water monitoring strategy that tracks flows as well as pollutant and nutrient loading; expanding water treatment facilities to increase capacity and reduce the use of combined sewer overflow systems; installing urban catch-basins to filter runoff before it reaches rivers, streams, and lakes; renaturing areas in and adjacent to cities; renaturing main-stem and tributary river banks throughout intense agricultural zones; employing sustainable agricultural practices such as installation of cover crops and field rotation techniques, use of low flow irrigation, formation of tiered fields, planting of riparian borders, setting of conservation easements, incorporation of integrated pest management techniques, and restoration of forests, grasslands, and river ecosystems.

More than 35 percent of the world’s traditional cropland is located within major global-river basins, producing the vast majority of the world’s food supply. Among these, the Mississippi River Basin ranks first in production capacity. In addition, less than 1 percent of the world’s stock of freshwater is readily accessible by people; of that less than 1 percent, rivers sustain the most withdraws, and yet only account for 0.006 percent of the world’s freshwater. The agreement seeks to mitigate the climate change threat to these basins just as these regions respond to an exploding global population that will require more food production over the next 35 years than in the last ten thousand.
Mississippi River Mayors Claim Victory for Priorities in 2016 Omnibus Funding Bill

(Washington, DC)—Dec 18, the U.S. House and Senate passed an omnibus funding bill for FY 2016 that includes major priorities of the Mayors of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative. Passage of this measure is a major victory for the mayors of MRCTI who have worked very hard over the past three years to save and reinvigorate Federal programs vital to the sustainability and prosperity of the Mississippi River—the most important inland waterway to the nation. Since MRCTI's first visit to Washington in 2013, our mayors have come together to push for essential resources for America’s Waterway. We are very pleased that our work has paid-off.

We could not have realized this success alone, however. The 35-member bi-cameral Mississippi River Caucus of the House and Senate has been crucial in their support of revitalizing the ecology and economy of the Mississippi River Valley.

MRCTI Priorities Included in Funding Measure:
- $100 million for the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program ($75 million above FY 2015);
- $164.92 million for Clean Water Act Nonpoint Source (Section 319) Grant Program ($5.66 million over FY 2015);
- $19.787 Million for the Upper Mississippi River Basin Restoration Program (equal to administration's request);
- $12 Million for the NRCS Watershed Rehab Program;
- Reauthorization and funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund through September 30, 2018, at $450 million in discretionary funds ($143.86 Million above FY 2015);
- $5 million for the Marine Highway Grant Program (first funding since 2007);
- $5.99 billion for the Army Corps of Engineers overall budget ($535 million over FY 2015);
- $48 million for operations and maintenance of small harbors and channels (directs a new study on the cumulative economic impact of the all shallow draft ports on the Mississippi River between St. Louis, Missouri, and Baton Rouge, LA).