Mississippi River
Mayors Sign Global Investment Partnership

Agreement links MRCTI Cities to $2 trillion global portfolio

Mayors announced a new partnership with CDP (formerly Carbon Disclosure Project). The international not-for-profit organization and founder houses the world’s largest collection of self-disclosed corporate environmental data. CDP North America has a network of investors that use CDP’s data to make evidence-based decisions. Their network of investors and purchasers represents over $100 trillion and their 89 supply chain members represent a combined purchasing power of over $2 trillion.

“CDP invented environmental disclosures linked to investor awareness in 2003 and has since then extended it to 571 cities worldwide so as to better showcase their infrastructure needs and operations,” said Paula DiPerna, Global Advisor for environment and finance for CDP North America.

“Since the Mississippi River economy generates nearly $500 billion annually, Mississippi River cities can be an attractive performer,” said Mayor Coleman whose comments reflected the earlier sentiments expressed by Mayor Jackson-Hicks who stated that the River is the “best potential to attract opportunity”.

“Instead of depending on federal money that may or may not materialize, or a federal infrastructure package that may or may not pass in the near-term with new funding attached, we are pursuing our own options and increasing our own chances of attracting investment into the Mississippi River Corridor,” stated MRCTI Co-Chair, Mayor Coleman, of St. Paul, Minnesota.

The Mayors and CDP signed the agreement for a partnership that will match Mississippi River resilience and sustainable economic development projects to a $2 trillion global investment portfolio. “The key to making this agreement work is for MRCTI cities to profile their projects within CDP’s database. That way, CDP can actually exhibit what our cities are doing to investors world-wide. We will be holding another training session for cities to enter their projects in late January,” explained Colin Wellenkamp, MRCTI Executive Director.

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**Mayors Urge National Strategy for Natural and Built Infrastructure to Avoid Another Katrina**

More than two-dozen Mayors from the length of the Mississippi River gathered for the sixth annual meeting of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI). Mayors called for a national infrastructure proposal in light of recent damage caused by hurricanes.

Mayor of St. Louis, MO and host of this year’s annual MRCTI meeting, Lyda Krewson, emphasized the significance of the Mississippi River to St. Louis, “We pull over 100 million gallons out of the River every day for our drinking water supply, the waterway makes possible the Port of St. Louis which is the nation’s third largest inland-waterway port by tonnage, and it is a major source of tourism for our region attracting millions of visitors every year helping to make tourism and outdoor recreation the second-largest economy in the ten-state corridor.”

“The Mississippi River represents the best potential to attract opportunity. The River is our past heritage and our future strength,” claimed Co-Host Mayor Jackson-Hicks of East St. Louis, IL across the River from St. Louis, MO.

Mayors emphasized ways in which natural infrastructure plays a critical role in cleaning and managing water. “The natural infrastructure of the Mississippi River Delta alone provides $12 to $47 billion in benefits to the economy annually,” noted Mayor Coleman.

The national cost of past hurricanes is steep, reaching over $110 billion for Hurricane Katrina alone. Mayor Johnson of St. Gabriel, LA, next to Baton Rouge, shared a few hard-learned lessons for longer-term recovery vehicles. Make the recovery inclusive of all in need;

Make the recovery inclusive of all in need;
- Ensure an operable proportion of recovery funds actually goes to FEMA;
- Ensure recovery funds go to recovery and resilience, not other projects;
- Establish disaster recovery block grants to help localities recover long term;
- Establish a disaster recovery spending strategy with input from mayors, county executives, and governors.

“Everything we have been talking about points to one tremendous need – infrastructure,” declared Mayor Johnson. MRCTI announced a call for a national infrastructure plan with innovative solutions such as a “Resilience Revolving Loan Fund”.

Additionally, former Mayor of Atlanta and current Ambassador, Andrew Young discussed ways to enhance the infrastructure of the Corridor.
Mayors Begin Collaboration with State Legislators to Improve Water Quality

MRCTI and the National Caucus of Environmental State Legislators jointly hosted a session with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and the natural resource departments of Iowa, Missouri, and Louisiana to improve resources on the ground for addressing nutrient loading at the local and state level.

“Our partnership is particularly valuable concerning source water protection because so much of what states can do in terms of addressing impaired waters is set by the state’s clean water standards which are passed by the legislature. So, we have mayors whose economy and public health depend on access to clean water along with the state legislators who enact protections of water sources together starting to work together,” explained MRCTI Co-Chair elect Frank Klipsch, Mayor of Davenport, IA.

“As mayors, we see the 319 Water Pollution Control grant program as money on the table to help us directly address errant nutrients. 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. So, we wanted to sit down and have a serious discussion on how we increase the capacity of these grants within states to reduce nutrient loading into our River. Mayors would like to explore the U.S. EPA partnering with the Natural Resource Conservation Service within USDA to ensure state 319 Grants plans include nutrient reduction capacities at an influential level. Along with that, we thought it important to ask the states how updates to the 319 program could be helpful to them in addressing these issues,” stated Jay Hollowell, Mayor of Helena-West Helena, AR.

The Mayors and state legislators were joined by Jeffery Robichaud, Director of the Water Division for EPA Region 7; Kevin Wickey, Regional Conservationist, Central Region, for NRCS; Colleen Meredith, Soil & Water Conservation Program Director for the Missouri Department of Natural Resources; Steve Hopkins, Nonpoint Source Coordinator for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources; and Brad Spicher, Environmental Scientist Manager for the Business, Community Outreach, and Incentives Division at the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality.

Mayors, State Legislators, and State Agencies Call for Expansion of EPA 319 Grant Program

Section 319 grant plans do not necessarily include nutrient loading. This is because 319 project funds can only be expended in areas where there is a 9-element watershed management plan for implementation of projects. Watershed management plans typically require standards by which to measure if a water body is impaired. Since there is no federal nutrient reduction standard, tackling nutrient loading with 319 funds is difficult under current rules.

Thus, Mayors, State Legislators, and state agency representatives at the session proposed the creation of a set-aside in the 319 grant for targeted areas similar to the USDA NRCS Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative or National Water Quality Initiative that are not tethered to the requirements of a 9-element plan. These targeted areas could be based on monitoring or established TMDLs etc. which are also used for 9-element plan development but implementation may be faster and more responsive to nutrient loading and other local issues.

Further, Mayors proposed the EPA partnering with the NRCS to ensure state 319 Grants plans include nutrient reduction capacities. Mayors and State Legislators were told by federal representatives that these proposals would need to be elevated within the EPA office of water; but that such a call coming from elected officials would make that elevation more important and valuable to the agency.

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition Becomes Chair of CAB

NSAC became chair of the MRCTI Corporate Advisory Board (CAB) at the Annual Meeting. Tetra Tech, a leading global infrastructure conglomerate, became vice chair and will automatically ascend to chair in Sept. 2018. NSAC pledges to work closely with the mayors in the formulation of their policy platform for the 2018 Farm Bill focusing on water quality.

Tetra Tech will continue to work with mayors on advising infrastructure renewal throughout the corridor toward achieve disaster resilience. Tetra Tech also discussed the securing of disaster assistance contracts before the damage occurs to increase response capacity and mitigate damage.

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Above: John Howe, former State Senator of Minnesota whose district includes MRCTI member city, Winona, MN and Jane Krentz, former State Senator also from Minnesota represents NEIL at the Water quality session during MRCTI’s Annual Meeting. Below left: Jeremy Emml, Managing Director of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and Jeremy Travis, National Operations Manager for Tetra Tech, Inc. take their seats as chair and vice chair of the MRCTI Corporate Advisory Board at the MRCTI Annual Mtg.
MRCTI Presents at World Summit of Great Rivers in ROME, Italy

Mayor Belinda Constant of Gretna, Louisiana, joined the Mayor of Rome and leaders representing ten of the world’s most important rivers across five continents representing the Mississippi River. The Italian Ministry for Environment, Land and Sea hosted the International Meeting of the Great Rivers of the World.

During her address, Mayor Constant reflected on the importance of the Mississippi River to the global food supply and outlined the common challenges:

“The great rivers of the world face an urgent problem—sustaining the Earth’s fresh water supply and majority of the world’s food production in the face of unprecedented climate impacts.”

Mayor Constant introduced the Meeting delegates to MRCTI’s International Food and Water Security Agreement brokered in Paris in 2015 to mitigate climate impacts on commodity production worldwide.

The Summit was a call to action for most river basin organizations, local, national and regional administrations to take more overt action toward channeling resources into river sustainability work. Mayor Constant implored delegates of the financial industry to develop a finance tool to support sustainability work in the world’s major food-producing river basins. “We propose that part of the COP 23 agenda during Water Action Day on November 10 be about creating a dedicated investment mechanism to sustain our food-producing river basins.”

“This is the first time the Mississippi River has been represented at this annual gathering of the world’s great rivers, which is shocking to us since the Mississippi Basin produces the most food commodities on earth,” claimed Executive Director of MRCTI, Colin Wellenkamp.

“This gathering of representatives of some of the most important water sources of the world could not come at a more critical time. Our future economies rely on our ability to act swiftly in addressing the increasing threat of climate change and its harmful impact on our water system.” Mayor Constant said to the assembly. Since 2005, the River Valley has sustained above $200 billion actual losses from natural disasters.

Mayor Constant concluded her speech by addressing the overlaying question in the room – how does the U.S. engage at these multi-lateral levels in the “America First” era? “America first does not have to mean America alone. My fellow mayors and I, on one of the world’s most important rivers, stand united and we stand with all of you to pursue solutions to the dramatic climate challenges we are facing together. Count us in; call on the Mississippi River Basin, Wherever our rivers are not linked by geography, they are linked by us and our rivers will comprise a quarter of global GDP. If we stand together and save our rivers, we will save ourselves, stated Mayor Constant.

Pictured top right: Delegates representing the world’s major food-producing river basins met in Rome including the Mississippi, Congo, Amazon, Nile, Yates, La Plata, and St. Lawrence Rivers. Pictured top left, right to left Mayor Belinda Constant, Gian Luca Galletti, Secretary of Environment, Land and Sea for Italy; Luca Lanzalone, President, ACQUA Multi-Utility Service Company of Rome. Bottom right: Mayor Belinda Constant; Hakima El Haite, Special Envoy for Climate Change, Kingdom of Morocco, Moroccan President of UNFCCC COP 22, Jean-Francois Donzor, Executive Secretary, Global Alliances for Water and Climate. Bottom left: Virginia Raggi, Mayor of Rome addresses the world’s great rivers.
MRCTI Co-Chairs Announce to World at UN Climate Meeting in Bonn, Germany that “We are still in”

Co-Chairs of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative, Mayor Frank Klipsch of Davenport and Mayor Lionel Johnson of St. Gabriel, LA came to COP 23 in Bonn, Germany for three reasons: 1) to work with the international community to achieve food and water security because most of the world’s food production and freshwater withdrawals come from river basins; 2) send the message that disengaging from the Paris Accord jeopardizes jobs and our economy; 3) profile the partnerships our region has at a global level to make our cities more resilient and sustainable.

“Most of the world’s food and fresh water come from river basins and those basins are being compromised. As representatives of the planet’s largest food-producing river, it is up to us to help ensure food and water security for the future.” -Lionel Johnson, Mayor of St. Gabriel, LA

The MRCTI Co-Chairs delivered 14 presentations to the international community across eleven sessions over the six days the mayors were in Bonn. The U.S. Climate Action Center, Water Action Day, and panels assembled by over a dozen nations featured MRCTI Co-Chairs in discussions on how river basins will comprise the planet’s most critical food and water sources plus contain nearly a quarter of global GDP by 2050.

Moving from Donors to Investors for Climate

Mayors Klipsch and Johnson implored the world to develop a multi-lateral dedicated investment mechanism to sustain our food-producing river basins. The mayors proposed coaching the mechanism in the global supply chain in order to better entice private sector participants through the profit motive. Investment in water within the UN is dominated by a donor culture. Mayors propose adding to the donor capacity with a ‘return-on-investment’ platform. The Mayors used the recently announced partnership with CDP on investment matchmaking as an example of this work.

MRCTI Co-Chairs Present Partnership with Walmart and Kellogg on Water Quality

MRCTI, Walmart, and Kellogg lead a session inside the U.S. Climate Action Center on using the global supply chain to incentivize sustainable agriculture across the Mississippi River Basin.

“Our agricultural and manufacturing economies depend on the Mississippi River. International negotiations that impact our commodities trade must take into account our corridor if our agricultural exports are to remain competitive.” -Frank Klipsch, Mayor of Davenport, IA

Mayors discussed how they are working with Walmart to send market signals that controlling for nutrient loading in the supply chain is critical and cities want to link that control to procurement. Walmart’s fertilizer optimization program and Kellogg’s on-orchard practices create capacity to tie nutrient reduction to profit.

Co-Chairs did not stop with Kellogg; however, they met with and discussed the partnership further with Mars Foods, Inc. to bring them into the project.
MRCTI Co-Chairs Bring the Mississippi to the Rhine

Mayors Klipsch and Johnson joined over 300 local elected officials from across the globe for the local and regional governments summit at COP 23 (pictured left).

MRCTI Co-Chairs presented at “Water Action Day” in Bonn and signed the Bonn Declaration calling for restoration of natural infrastructure for rivers, lakes, and streams globally (pictured bottom left).

The Co-Chairs conducted two conversations with Mars Foods, Inc. in an effort to join the company to the MRCTI—Walmart partnership incentivizing nutrient reduction on acreage through commodity purchasing. Mayors met with Kevin Rabinovitch, Global VP of Sustainability and Chief Climate Officer at Mars (pictured below).
Illinois is considering new amendments to their levee management statutes. Frankly, just as Mayor Smiley has said, it’s hard for us to decipher what the rules are for flood control. We are subject to overlapping considerations from the federal, state, and county levels,” explained Mayor Buol at the Annual Meeting business session during which the Corps presented to the MRTC the pending results of their study on levee impacts to flooding.

“This issue is particularly acute for us here in Missouri as there are several over-built levees in the region positioned with little to no set-back from the water and Missouri currently does not have any state-wide statutes on levee structural requirements like Illinois and Iowa. This creates a complicated situation where exactly how cities should proceed in dealing with levee issues becomes rather obscured...,” advised Mayor Jo Anne Smiley.

In contrast to flooding, drought is a growing concern. In the 2014 Farm Bill MRTC was able to secure language that requires Federal agencies make local governments an integral part of national drought policy. Federal agencies decided that the creation of a National Drought Council was the best way to meet the Congressional mandate. NOAA has formed the Council. Mayor Robert Gallagher of Bettendorf, IA represented MRTC at the Council’s inaugural meeting.

**Mayor Klipsch and Mayor Johnson are Voted-in as new Co-Chairs of MRTC**

Frank Klipsch of Davenport, IA and Lionel Johnson of St. Gabriel, LA (pictured below) were voted-in by the MRTC membership as the Co-Chairs of MRTC for 2017-2019. They are joined by a newly elected Executive Committee comprised of:

The Honorable Sarah Strommen, Ramsey, MN; The Honorable Tim Kabat, La Crosse, WI; The Honorable Bob Gallagher, Bettendorf, IA; The Honorable Lyda Krewson, St. Louis, MO; The Honorable Emeka Jackson-Hicks, East St. Louis, IL; The Honorable Jay Hollowell, Helena-West Helena, AR; The Honorable Jim Strickland, Memphis, TN; The Honorable Darryl Grennell, Natchez, MS; The Honorable Sharon Weston Broome, Baton Rouge, LA.

The Association’s new Executive Committee members pledged immediate action around recruitment, clean water, and infrastructure investment; as well as appointed Mayor Kabat as Treasurer and Mayor Gallagher as Secretary.

Mayor Jo Anne Smiley of Clarksville, MO and Mayor Roy Buol (immediate past Treasurer of MRTC) of Dubuque, IA have been working since June to lead MRTC’s efforts around levee reform. Management of flood risk in the Upper Mississippi River Valley is much more local in nature than in the lower stem. This has led to a variance of practices in the most flood-prone region stretching from Iowa to the booteheel of Missouri. Levees throughout the region are overbuilt, directly adjacent to the bank, and structurally compromised in some places.

Pointedly, mayors have been asked repeatedly how they feel about levees protecting farm land possibly exposing cities to heightened risk. Mayors see productive agricultural land as a tremendous asset within the region providing jobs and economy for cities.

The majority of MRTC members are rural communities where agriculture is an essential part of the economy and revenue for the area; so, Mayors don’t see a rural/urban dichotomy in this debate. Instead, mayors see opportunity – opportunity to manage the system more sustainably.

“Cities have a considerable stake in this discussion. We have a stake in being impacted both in positive and negative ways by flood control practices. Cities can and should be part of the solution to the issues we are facing. Right now, mayors are caught in the middle of the debate. Levee permitting is a local issue in Missouri; and
**FEMA Accepts MRCTI Proposal to Expand Disaster Mitigation Grant Program, Roles-Out New Grant in 2017**

Facing mounting disasters of unprecedented severity and frequency, loss of life, and over-strapped state budgets, in 2015, MRCTI Mayors proposed to FEMA a multi-state Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) grant option so that disaster could be addressed at the scale they occur—regionally. Before August 2017, states could not join their applications in mitigating disaster impacts across their own boundaries, now, with the work of the Mayors, they can for the first time ever. Roy Wright (pictured above far right), Deputy Associate Administrator for FEMA informed the Mayors of this exciting development.

FEMA has created a multi-state category within PDM and Mayors believe FEMA could not have responded better to the proposal. The multi-state is the third priority of spending for the grant, has been separated from state planning requirements, and does not interfere with state project priorities. Most MRCTI cities reside adjacent to state borders making a transboundary grant critical. Cities can contact their state hazard mitigation officer and urge they pursue these funds. The next round of funding is expected to be available in the spring.

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**McKnight Foundation Gives MRCTI Positive Marks on Progress**

Half-way through the most recent grant, the McKnight Foundation shared with MRCTI leadership that managers were “thrilled” with MRCTI’s progress to date around improving water quality. Immediate Past Co-Chair, St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman and Executive Director, Colin Wellenkamp met with McKnight Mississippi River Program Director Mark Muller (pictured second from left) and Program Officer, Julia Olmstead (pictured far left) at the Foundation offices in Minneapolis to give an update on performance. The second year for MRCTI’s grant began this fall. McKnight’s support of MRCTI has proven indispensable.

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**MRCTI Capitol Meeting in Washington, DC set for March 6-8, 2018**

MRCTI’s Capitol Meeting will take place March 6-8 in Washington, DC. The Association will unveil its 2018 Federal Policy Platform as well as pursue tremendous new development regarding investment in the Mississippi River Valley. NOW is the time for Mayors to move their region to the national level. Mayors’ offices may make their reservations at the Phoenix Park Hotel by calling 202-638-6900 and asking for the “Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative Room Block.” This is the opportunity for us to bring resources into our Corridor.