Mayors

Take-on Plastic Pollution,
Announce Multi-State Commitment to Reduce Plastic Waste in Mississippi River, Companies Pledge support

More than thirty Mayors from the length of the Mississippi River gathered for the seventh annual meeting of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI) in the Quad Cities, September 18-20. Mayors announced a commitment with state legislators and companies on an effort to reduce plastic waste in the Mississippi River Valley by calling on levels of government and organizations to reduce their plastic waste 20% by 2020.

“The Mississippi River provides billions of gallons of fresh water to industry each day and drinking water to 20 million people in 50 cities. But when up to 80% of the plastic in our oceans comes from land-based sources and the Mississippi River drains an expansive 31-state landscape, it becomes clear that possibly 40 percent of plastic pollution in the Gulf originates from the Mississippi River,” stated Mayor Rita Albrecht of Bemidji, MN, first city on the Mississippi River.

“Plastics are what we refer to as a persistent pollutant. Plastics don’t break down, they simply become smaller and eventually turn into a dangerous confetti that spreads toxins and accumulates in the food chain eventually harming all of us through the food we eat and the water we drink,” explained Mayor Lionel Johnson of St. Gabriel, LA and MRCTI Co-Chair.

State legislators gathered with Mayors to pledge action on plastic waste reduction commissions in each of the ten states that would work with cities to implement plans that work to reduce plastic waste in the Mississippi River Valley.

“We’re standing with our Mayors on their effort to address this growing problem. One of the things we can do is form a plastic waste

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waste reduction commission in each state along the River that can work with our cities to establish practices targeting plastic waste that too often makes its way into our valuable watershed,” said State Representative Abe Hudson of Mississippi speaking for the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators.

“Plastic waste reduction needs to be addressed by leaders at every level of government. As states, we can look at this comprehensively. There are a number of options on the table for states to consider, but establishing these commissions is definitely a solid step. Plastic pollution is a big problem throughout our watershed and reducing it will be a complex effort involving all of us including recycling, waste management, and greater consumer awareness to reduce their consumption of single-use plastics,” stated State Representative Rick Hansen of Minnesota also speaking for the MRLC, a project of the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators.

Mayors were also joined by two companies that have come forward making the commitment to reduce their plastic waste 20% by 2020. Both Heart of America Group and Dynamic Restaurant Holdings whose coupled footprint includes hotels and restaurants from Florida to the Dakotas, pledged their own effort to meet the Mayors’ call to action.

“We’re completely committed to reducing our plastic waste footprint. We have also invited our team members and vendors into this conversation to brainstorm with us on ideas that can help make a difference for the environment and our next generation. In conjunction, we are also working to ensure our participation with the sustainable forest initiative” elaborated Kristel Whitty-Ersan, Director of Marketing, Dynamic Restaurant Holdings (Happy Joe’s Pizza & Ice Cream Parlors).

“Until recently, we had been looking at reducing our carbon footprint and powering more of our facilities with renewable energy. Now, we are adding plastic waste to our obligations because our water resources are so important,” said Mike Whalen, President & CEO of Heart of America Group.

“There needs to be an equal if not larger private sector response to this problem as plastics are just so pervasive throughout our economy. For instance, the amount of plastic produced from 2000 - 2010 exceeds the amount produced during the entire last century, stated Mayor Frank Klipsch of Davenport, IA and Co-Chair of MRCTI.

Mayors of the Mississippi River Sign Landmark Agreement with Federal Agencies: USGS, USACE, DOT

From top of page: Mississippi State Representative Abe Hudson; Kristel Ersan, Director of Marketing for Dynamic Restaurant Holdings; Michelle Sparkman, Director of Communications for Heart of America Group.

Left: MRCTI and three federal agencies sign water quality agreement. Pictured L to R: Lauren Brand, Associate Administrator for Intermodal Systems Dev, U.S. Maritime Administration; Leon Carol, USGS; Mayor Sharon Weston-Broome of Baton Rouge, LA; MRCTI Co-Chair Mayor Lionel Johnson of St. Gabriel, LA; General Richard Kaiser, Commander, Mississippi Valley Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; MRCTI Co-Chair Mayor Frank Klipsch of Davenport, IA
This agreement is important for us because it will bring us closer to a real-time nutrient monitoring net for the Mississippi River. This added security feature for our source water is paramount to sustaining our freshwater economy of $300 billion in annual revenue. It will also be able to tell us if the hundreds of millions of dollars going into conservation work to reduce nutrient loading is actually making a difference, explained Mayor Sharon Weston Broome of Baton Rouge, LA.

“This landmark agreement is especially relevant for me since our region near the Gulf of Mexico is plagued by the hypoxia zone which is 60% attributable to the errant nutrients flowing out of the Mississippi River,” said Lionel Johnson, Mayor of St. Gabriel, LA and MRCTI Co-Chair.

The agreement to deploy nutrient monitors on barges that transect the Mississippi River from St. Paul to New Orleans involves both the public and private sectors. Today’s signing is the first instance both mayors and three federal agencies have come together to protect source water at this scale for the Mississippi River.

Mayors Announce Grant and Pilot Projects to Improve Resilience throughout Corridor

Mayors also announced with CDP North America, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the Wells Fargo Resilient Communities grant program, the securing of a grant that will aid Mississippi River cities with their efforts to link built and natural infrastructure projects with investment opportunities. Cities where this grant will be rolled-out include LaGrange, MO; Davenport, IA, Memphis, TN; New Orleans, LA.

“Working with the CDP and its partners I am confident we can secure investment for sustainable infrastructure to move our plans forward,” said Memphis Mayor, Jim Strickland.

“We are truly happy to announce that CDP has received an award from National Fish and Wild Foundation and Wells Fargo’s Resilient Communities program to support our project, “Scaling Green Infrastructure in Cities through Matchmaker”. Through this grant, CDP will be partnering with 18 U.S. cities, including the City of Memphis, the City of LaGrange, City of Davenport, IA, the City of New Orleans, that are currently facing considerable environmental stresses from climate change – such as water shortages, storm water runoff and loss of tree cover – by bolstering their sustainable green infrastructure projects and showcasing them to private sector investors, ultimately helping to get them financed,” said Lance Pierce, President, CDP North America.

Finally, Mayors also announced two pilot projects including one with the insurance brokerage industry to develop a disaster recovery insurance facility for the entire Mississippi River Valley as well as a drought economic impact study with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration within the US Department of Commerce.

“We’ve sustained a couple hundred billion worth of disaster impacts along the Mississippi River since 2005. Drought, intense heat, and flooding are our growing concerns that we need to build resilience against. Drought is especially worrisome for us especially since one of the worst in the Valley persists in Iowa, explained Mayor Bob Gallagher of Bettendorf, IA.

Congresswoman Cheri Bustos 17th District of IL who serves on the General Farm Commodities and Risk Management Subcommittee of House Agriculture shares her thoughts on the tariff contest.

Pictured L to R: Mayor Jim Strickland of Memphis, TN; Emily Kreps, VP of Investment for CDP; Aprill Blanco, VP of Public Policy for Wells Fargo; Mayor Frank Klipsch of Davenport, IA; Mayor Mike Lowe of LaGrange, MO; John Roach, LaGrange Administrator.
Quad Cities Set New Records With Hosting of MRCTI Annual Meeting

Above: An 11-member color guard is lead into the Annual Meeting welcome reception by the Quad City Bagpipe Band presenting the flag of each Mississippi River state along with the U.S. stars and stripes.

Left: The Quad City Mayors and MRCTI Co-Chairs in front of Quarters One at the Rock Island Arsenal during the opening of the Host City Showcase Dinner at the MRCTI Annual Meeting. Pictured L to R: MRCTI Co-Chair Mayor Frank Klipsch of Davenport; Mayor Stephanie Acri of Moline, IL; Mayor Reggie Freeman of East Moline, IL; Mayor Mike Thoms of Rock Island, IL; Mayor Bob Gallagher of Bettendorf, IA; MRCTI Co-Chair Mayor Lionel Johnson of St. Gabriel, LA

The Quad Cities Annual Meeting broke several records: 1) most attendees; 2) most sponsors; 3) most funds raised; 4) most partnerships solidified; and 5) most number of elected officials present.

Not only did Mayors complete partnerships they have been working on the last year, but positioned MRCTI to solidify others including an agreement that will be unveiled in Washington, DC to help cities fund natural infrastructure restoration projects; a global supply chain partnership with Field to Market (see page 7); an economic impact study on drought with NOAA; and an insurance facility with the reinsurance industry.
Above: Mayor Rita Albrecht of Bemidji, MN (L); Mayor Reggie Freeman of East Moline, IL; and MRCTI Co-Chair Mayor Lionel Johnson of St. Gabriel, LA try their hand at firing Howitzer cannon on the banks of the Mississippi River at the Rock Island Arsenal during the Annual Meeting Host City Showcase Dinner.

Pictured L to R: Jeremy Travis, Manager of Operations at Tetra Tech, Inc. is brought-on as Chair of the MRCTI Corporate Advisory Board. Jeremy Emmi, Coalition Director for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition hands his chairmanship to Tetra Tech. Duple Travilion, Senior Government Affairs Representative at Federal Express is brought-on as Vice Chair of the MRCTI Corporate Advisory Board.

Pictured below: Emily Alwood, VP of Public Finance for PNC Financial Services Group affirms PNC’s commitment to join the MRCTI Corporate Advisory Board as the CAB’s first bank member.

PNC Joins MRCTI Corporate Advisory Board; Tetra Tech is new Board Chair

PNC Financial Services was sworn onto the MRCTI Corporate Advisory Board (CAB) by Mayor Kabat of La Crosse, WI at the Quad City Annual Meeting. PNC reached-out to MRCTI after learning about the Mayors’ work to build investment for infrastructure along the Mississippi River. Mayors also hope to work with PNC on broadening public finance options for cities in the Corridor.

Further, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition rotated off as chair of the CAB after working with Mayors on preserving essential conversation programs in the Farm Bill. Tetra Tech, Inc. has assumed the CAB chairmanship and Federal Express is Vice Chair. Tetra Tech asked Mayors to work on resilience and better prepare for frequent drought.
MRCTI Mayors Headline MPR Special Report on the Mississippi

This July, Minnesota Public Radio presented a special report on the Mississippi River as part of their program called “Flyover.” Flyover is a national call-in show from between the coasts and across the aisle. In July, producers took a trip down the Mississippi River to reach all of those who are affected by the waterway – from soybean farmers of the plains to “farmers of the sea” on shrimp boats on the Gulf Coast including Mayors. The show’s first stop was with MRCTI mayors from Minnesota and Missouri entitled “How Mississippi River Mayors Handle a Perfect Storm of Challenges.” Kerri Miller moderated a discussion with a group of mayors who are all faced with the urgency of delivering clean water to their communities in the face of tight city budgets, aging infrastructure, and a changing climate. Mayor Stang brought the discussion home describing how his front door was only meters from the River’s edge. Mayor Albrecht noted that where mayors are there too are the solutions.

GLOBAL CLIMATE ACTION SUMMIT

MRCTI Co-Chair joins Oppenheimer Funds in calling for Infrastructure Investment

Mayor Lionel Johnson of St. Gabriel, LA and MRCTI Co-Chair joined with Aniket Shah, head of sustainable investing for Oppenheimer Funds, in calling for a new level of global investment in the natural and built assets that keep the world fed in the Earth’s 7 major food-producing river basins—especially the Mississippi River Basin; the world’s #1 commodity producer. The platform for this call was the CA Global Climate Action Summit hosted by Governor Brown. Mayor Johnson and Aniket are not alone, international organizations like United Nations Environment also joined their voice in urging investment into the world’s supply chain ecosystem assets.
MRCTI Signs Agreement with Field to Market to Sustain US Commodity Supply Chain

On November 13 in Denver, CO at the Sustainable Agriculture Summit, MRCTI Co-Chair Lionel Johnson, Mayor of St. Gabriel, LA was joined by East St. Louis, IL Mayor Emeka Jackson-Hicks and Bettendorf, IA Mayor Bob Gallagher in signing an agreement with Field to Market to develop a city procurement directive that selects for food products sourced from acreage practicing sustainable agriculture.

Though this work will take time, Mayors were quick to assure over 600 representatives of the agricultural industry they were pledging to work with farmers and suppliers toward incentivizing sustainable practices—city water security and our $400+ billion economy depends on it.

MRCTI Joins ASA in Warning Federal Administration on Worsening Trade War

U.S. agricultural exports to China are critical to the Mississippi River economy, with exports of agricultural products to China totaling $19.6 billion in 2017. China is the largest international destination for U.S. soybeans, importing more than 27 million tons of U.S. soybeans in 2017 —30 percent of all U.S. soybean production—and is the second largest ag export market overall for the United States.

Half of the top ten soy-producing states in the U.S. are along the Mississippi River, with Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Arkansas ranking as 1, 2, 3, 6, and 10. Not only will the soybean tariff directly impact farmers and other facets of agriculture in those states, but also it will impact the nation’s freight industry; 30 percent of all U.S. soybeans are exported to China.

“My city resides just south of Baton Rouge where the port of southern Louisiana begins. Louisiana is set to be the hardest-hit state from proposed tariffs overall with the vast majority of that impact coming from soybeans; not because we are a top soy-producing state, but because we are the gateway port for that product to the rest of the world, and China is the largest destination,” said Lionel Johnson, Mayor of St. Gabriel, Louisiana, Co-chair of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative.

Agriculture is the third largest economy on the Mississippi River, generating $33 billion in annual revenue and directly supporting 192 thousand jobs in the Mississippi River Valley alone.

And, Mississippi River cities are sustained in part by several sectors of the economy that feed into commodity production, including shipping and manufacturing.

“$30.7 million worth of soybean exports from Iowa to China are threatened by the newest round of tariffs. My state ranks second in U.S. soybean production,” asserted Frank Klipsch, Mayor of Davenport, Iowa, and Co-chair of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative.

John Heisdorffer, a soybean grower from Keota, Iowa, and president of American Soybean Association expressed his concern, saying, “Our industry depends on trade with China. China imports roughly 30 percent of U.S. soybean exports, representing nearly 1 in 3 rows of harvested soybeans. We have spent more than 40 years building this market with China, and it is not a market U.S. soybean farmers can afford to lose.”
Mayor Frank Klipsch of Davenport, IA presented at a plenary session of the Resilient Together Annual Forum hosted by the National Resilience Partnership and the World Bank.

Mayor Klipsch was joined by Paula Pagniez, Director of Capital, Science, and Policy Practice at Willis Towers Watson insurance brokers (pictured top left).

Forum organizers asked Mayor Klipsch to discuss the innovative work being done around disaster recovery assistance lead by MRCTI.

In March 2018, the United Nations brokered a roundtable between MRCTI mayors and the global insurance industry bringing together reinsurers, brokers, recovery policy experts. Out of that roundtable came motivation to develop a disaster recovery facility for the entire Mississippi River Valley. Willis Towers Watson has been engaged in a pilot project to consider if such a recovery facility is possible with the current insurance marketplace and if it can be provided to MRCTI cities without significant financial lift.

Mayor Klipsch described what is needed—responding to extreme heat incidents, drought, and storms involves things like adding grid capacity, deploying cooling centers, adding personnel to emergency rooms, increasing our urban canopy and green space to absorb floods and act as heat sinks. Traditional insurance and laborious recovery regimes are ill equipped to address the new normal, instead we need a more parametric approach and that is what MRCTI is developing with the insurance and insurance brokerage industries.

**MRCTI Receives Record Grants from McKnight and Walton Foundations**

Davenport met with representatives from the Canadian Embassy to solidify plans for the Embassy to host the welcome dinner March 5.

**MRCTI Prepares to Meet in DC March 5-7, 2019**

Mayor Frank Klipsch of Davenport met with representatives from the Canadian Embassy to solidify plans for the Embassy to host the welcome dinner March 5.