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Mayors of MRCTI and Ducks Unlimited Applaud Historic Moment for the Mississippi River Corridor in Final Passage of the NDAA

December 16, 2022, Washington, DC – Mayors of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI) and Ducks Unlimited (DU) celebrate the historic passage of the nation’s first ever lower Mississippi River ecological restoration program. The lower river program joins a decades-old upper river counterpart to create one approach for the entire river.

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. Sen. John Boozman (AR) advocated for this language in the bill and has been a constant champion for the Mississippi River.

“This is a historic moment for the state of Arkansas and the Mississippi River Corridor which is so vital to our national security and economy. Through this demonstration program, we now can begin moving conservation projects at a comprehensive scale to enhance the living resources of the lower Mississippi River,” said John Boozman, United States Senator (AR) and member of the bi-cameral Mississippi River Caucus.

MRCTI and Ducks Unlimited are honored to have worked closely with Senator Boozman to develop and move this new program as it will support the complementary work and priorities of both organizations.

“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,” explained Mayor Jim Strickland of Memphis, TN and MRCTI Co-Chair.

Specifically, MRCTI and DU 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. Today’s passage of WRDA and particularly this program will greatly assist this innovative partnership.

“We are so pleased to be united with the Mayors of the Mississippi River in working with Senator Boozman to develop and pass this program,” said Adam Putnam, CEO of Ducks Unlimited. “The Lower Mississippi River Demonstration Program allows for non-federal partners to assist
the Army Corps of Engineers in restoring important habitat for the benefit of both wildlife and people, and we thank our partners in Congress for prioritizing this program.”

“Senator Boozman has shown real vision and bipartisan leadership in championing new and innovative solutions for the challenges facing our farmers, manufacturers, and civic leaders in keeping our economy whole in the face of mounting risk. Using natural infrastructure, conservation, and ecosystem restoration as a means to deliver disaster resilience and service reliability is new and has rarely been applied at corridor scale,” emphasized Kevin Smith, Mayor of Helena – West Helena, AR and MRCTI Arkansas State Chair.

The historic nature of this WRDA passage will set the stage for more resilience and mitigation work to be applied throughout the Corridor at both the local and national levels.

“We celebrate the bipartisanship of this success today. I’m very pleased to see so much support for this effort from leaders like Roger Wicker from my state of Mississippi as well as Senator Cassidy of Louisiana,” said Mayor Errick Simmons of Greenville, MS and MRCTI Co-Chair. We are anxious to move this work forward. The WRDA program follows many of the priorities set forth in the Mayors’ Andrew Young Safeguarding the Mississippi River Together Act (SMRT Act) which works to make the Mississippi River Corridor a national priority – an urgency shared by this new WRDA program.”

Mayors and DU both look forward to working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to begin designing and deploying the projects supported by the new lower river demonstration program toward generating many co-benefits for the region and the nation around economy and ecology.

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**The Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative** is a coalition of 102 mayors from across the Mississippi River Basin, which spans nearly a third of the country. The Mississippi River provides drinking water to more than 20 million people and 50 cities. More than 60 billion gallons of fresh water is withdrawn from the river daily. The River’s resources support 1.5 million jobs and create $496.7 billion in annual revenue.

**Ducks Unlimited Inc.** is the world's largest nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving North America's continually disappearing waterfowl habitats. Established in 1937, Ducks Unlimited has conserved almost 15 million acres thanks to contributions from more than a million supporters across the continent. Guided by science and dedicated to program efficiency, DU works toward the vision of wetlands sufficient to fill the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow and forever. For more information on our work, visit [www.ducks.org](http://www.ducks.org).