



THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER, OUR FIRST WIRELESS CONNECTION

Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative **2023 Federal Policy Platform**

A policy proposal that works for the
world's most crucial working river corridor

MRCTI WASHINGTON, DC
MAYORS' CONVENING

MRCTI 2023 Capitol Meeting, Washington, DC March 1-3

Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative 2023 Policy Platform

A Proposal that Works for America's Working River



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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

Bringing National Resources to Our Corridor

We present this Federal Policy Platform for 2023 to our national leaders and regional stakeholders. *This is a transformative and historic moment for the Mississippi River Corridor.* With the passage of the Bi-Partisan Infrastructure Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, the next five years can bring the most resources to the Mississippi River Corridor since the New Deal.

103 Cities of Middle America. Our Corridor is a national treasure of environmental services vital to our nation’s economic security and critical to commodity production, manufacturing, and transportation. MRCTI encompasses dynamic urban areas and resource-rich rural regions. Our strength stems from the diversity of our member communities whose populations span from hundreds to millions.

We Are a Competitive Region to Deploy the Jobs Act and the IRA. Nearly \$1 trillion of product moves on the Mississippi River annually generating \$500 billion in revenue, and employing over 1.3 million people. Our Mayors have realized success in making the corridor more resilient and a competitive option for global investment. *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 with long-term and 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 2023.*

This Platform Makes Our Corridor a National Model. The Mississippi River Basin produces 92 percent of United States agricultural exports and makes possible over \$400 billion worth of fresh-water-dependent manufacturing. Using the value we bring and the impacts we have sustained as a baseline, we can determine the infrastructure best suited to help us mitigate our new climate reality and create policies to assist this work on the ground in our cities.

The Mayors of the Mississippi River present this platform incorporating resilience, national climate adaptation, 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 funds that will ensure great reach and effectiveness of the IJA and IRA.*

What follows here are eight major policy recommendations together with ten appropriation priorities to comprise our platform for 2023. As a stakeholder in this work, we hope you can join us in moving this proposal forward.

Appropriation Priorities in brief

Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration

Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative share in EQIP \$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 \$50 million
U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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

EPA Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program (directive language) \$10 million
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (partnership with NRCS)

Five Star Urban Waters Restoration Program (directive language) \$10 million
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Drinking Water Infrastructure Resilience & Sustainability Program \$30 million
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Community Water System Risk and Resilience Program \$55 million
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

USGS Water Resources Program +11 million
U.S. Department of Interior, (USGS) to baseline spending

Transportation, HUD, & Related Agencies

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

Authorization Priorities in brief

Farm Bill Reauthorization

The 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 Farm Bill will affect every community along the Mississippi River regardless of size. MRCTI priorities are focused on conservation for disaster resilience and using the legislation to finally better equip the nation with comprehensive drought policy.

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 support federal coordination, improve infrastructure, develop innovative approaches to remove nutrients, and sustain a thriving economy on the Mississippi River.

National Climate Adaptation and Resilience Strategy Act (NCARS)

The federal administration is currently spending over \$100 billion per year on climate-related programs and recovery. Yet, there is no comprehensive national climate strategy for federal activity. The NCARS bill would change all of that.

Flood Resilience and Taxpayer Savings Act

The US taxpayer does not have to be saddled with the total costs of flooding when resilience measures could have been embedded into infrastructure projects during the design phase. This bill ensures that federal investment will take into account future flooding and ensure that projects are built correctly the first time.

Resilient AMERICA Act

The bill would more than double funding for FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program, which provides communities with resources to plan and implement hazard mitigation projects. It would also expand BRIC eligibility to private non-profits.

Climate RESILIENCE Act

Currently, extreme changes in temperature that produce freezing conditions or a heatwave that cause significant damage in communities across the country are not eligible to be declared major disasters or eligible for preventative funding from FEMA. This bill fixes those oversights to protect communities.

Water Data Act

The Water Data Act will create a national framework for water data to support innovation and the development of next generation technologies to empower water managers on the ground. This bill will use data to bring together the federal government to improve the supervision and understanding of water thereby equipping the nation to better manage water at corridor, watershed, and basin scales.

National Bottle Bill and Recycling Infrastructure Accessibility Act

This bill creates a national bottle deposit program, incentivizing the return of plastic bottles used for drinkable products. Funding would help with litter clean-up and recycling programs. The bill will also support the use of more recycled material in plastic bottles to support marketability of post-consumer waste.

“I am proud to be part of MRCTI and advocate for the most vulnerable of our Corridor. Together, mayors are lifting our region and making bold, innovative proposals...”

-Tishaura Jones, Mayor of St. Louis, MO



Agriculture, Rural Development & Related Agencies

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

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 that prioritizes for vulnerable communities and builds economic growth through 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 resilience of ecosystems along the Mississippi River Corridor, the restoration of ecosystems along the Mississippi River Corridor, the enhancement of environmental services that sustain agriculture production and freshwater sources for drinking and manufacturing, as well as the deployment of natural infrastructure to reduce disaster impacts.

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 FY2024. 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	\$50 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, however, the majority of the award should go toward specific wetland restoration projects.

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 level funding of the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund at \$50 million for FY 2024. In tandem with the WCF allocation, MRCTI mayors also urge 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 FY 2023.

Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program.....\$10 million U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Background:

The Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program’s goal is to accelerate and expand the strategic protection of healthy, freshwater ecosystems and their watersheds. EPA and the Endowment each committed \$3.75 million and NRCS \$3.5 million, to the six-year partnership. In the fourth year of the program alone, there were 48 applications requesting \$9 million, the EPA made nine awards a total of \$1.52 million. Showing the huge potential of the program to grow.

Grants focus on three categories: 1) short-term funding to leverage larger financing for targeted watershed protection; 2) funds to help build the capacity of local organizations for sustainable, long-term watershed protection; and 3) new techniques or approaches that advance the state of practice for watershed protection and that can be replicated across the country.

The Issue – Scale-up Priority

A total of 56 grants enabled local partners across approximately 30 states and 9 EPA regions to implement watershed protection plans, build the organizational and social infrastructure needed for long-term protection efforts, and advance watershed practices. The average grant size was approximately \$180K. Unfortunately, as this was a jointly funded program, the funding has run out the program completed its current round of funding in 2022.

As this program is funded by EPA and NRCS, it does not have permanent allocation to ensure the work can expand and fill the needed role healthy watersheds can play in sustaining the environmental service and economy of the nation. Currently, more is needed to be done to focus on funding larger watershed projects that include multiple states. This program provided an important role to build the capacity of local organizations and fund new innovative technics.

Currently, much of the federal government’s watershed protection does not encourage projects scaled-up to large basins and multi-state corridors like the entire Mississippi. It also does not recognize the role that expanding freshwater ecosystems can play in disaster resilience or how these assets can be used for innovative approaches to water management in city/state clusters. The consortium grant is well positioned to make significant progress in all these areas of large landscape climate mitigation if that priority is articulated by Congress.

Therefore, the Mayors urge Congress to fund this program as permanent spending at \$10 million within the EPA’s budget. The existing endowment and NRCS contributions can remain and complement EPA funding. Congress needs to make clear that this program should prioritize for multi-state watershed projects that include disaster resilience and climate performance capacities.

Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Program.....\$10 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.

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 \$10 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.

Drinking Water Infrastructure Resilience & Sustainability....\$30 million
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Community Water System Risk and Resilience Program...\$55 million
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Background:

Water infrastructure resilience, sustainability, innovation, and risk reduction were parceled out into a variety of short-term programs made available through the 2018 passage of America's Water Infrastructure Act. These programs are authorized at modest amounts totaling only \$264 million for the entire nation. These programs are designed to offer key infusions of capital into large or small water systems that require single fund infusions to reach project success.

The Issue:

According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, there is a \$300 billion investment shortfall in drinking water and wastewater infrastructure investment. The drinking water wastewater investment shortfall for the ten states along the Mississippi River is \$92.1 billion. Though the investments in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will make significant investments to help with this infrastructure, these programs fulfill very specific purposes that are needed in our communities and did not receive funding in that package.

Two accounts, in particular, assist cities with better leveraging the multi-billion state revolving loan program (SRFs) and the innovative Water Infrastructure Financing Innovation Act credit program (WIFIA): The Drinking Water System Infrastructure Resilience & Sustainability Program and the Community Water System Risk and Resilience Program. Though only authorized for a combined maximum funding level of under thirty million dollars, both grants add to city resilience and mitigation capacities for the extensive water system infrastructure that must be maintained. The drinking water system grant offers aid to help small or disadvantaged communities prepare their drinking water infrastructure for threats like floods, hurricanes, and hydrologic changes.

Beneficially, the community water system program expands on the drinking water system grant by focusing on and augmenting the community water system emergency plan requirements under EPA. Local governments can use the community water system risk and resilience program for planning by expanding their emergency plan capacity and application. During the 2019 floods, cities along the Mississippi River sustained flooding for over 270 days in some places. High water for this long-duration created new water system impacts not typically seen during flood events such as massive subsoil shifting, a record number of sinkholes, and systemic damage to water treatment plants.

Therefore, MRCTI mayors call on Congress to fund at the full authorized level the drinking water and community water system resilience grants to provide cities a group of funding options for the diverse infrastructure problems facing aging municipal water systems. These programs will further support the substantive investment made in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

USGS Water Resources Program.....+11 million to Baseline
U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Geological Survey

Background:

Nutrient loading and sediment transport and deposition are two critical water-quality issues in the Mississippi River Basin (MRB). These issues can affect drinking water supplies, aquatic ecosystem health, manufacturing, utilities, and navigation on the main-stem Mississippi River. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) operates the National Water Quality Network (NWQN) for Rivers and Streams to assess the status of – and changes in – water-quality conditions. New sensor technologies can continuously measure concentrations of nitrate and phosphate, and estimate suspended-sediment concentrations.

The proposed monitoring network will deliver near real-time estimates of nutrient and sediment concentrations and loads at key locations across the Mississippi River Basin (MRB). The data would be delivered using a state-of-the-art mapping and visualization website that would enable water managers, key stakeholders, and the public to track how nutrients and sediment move throughout the MRB, evaluate how effective agricultural management practices are at reducing nutrient and sediment contributions to large inland watersheds and the main-stem Mississippi River, and provide a significant ability to track the impacts of floods or contaminant spills on a near real-time basis.

The one-time cost to purchase and install the necessary sensors and infrastructure at the 54 monitoring sites is approximately \$5M. Funds to operate and maintain the continuous sensors, add discrete water-quality sampling at selected sites to verify sensor data, and to analyze, quality-assure, and deliver information on a website would be about \$6M per year.

The Issue:

Nutrient loading is one of the greatest threats to our business lines on the river because it compromises water quality, impedes manufacturing, and depresses the tourism and recreation industries that account for the second largest economy on the waterway. States are working to reduce nutrient loading into the watershed, but require robust monitoring to help them determine if their reduction practices are working at a regional scale. Hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent across the landscape on this issue blindly if there is not systemic monitoring in place to measure the effectiveness of nutrient reduction projects.

The FY 2023 funding level for the USGS Water Resources Program was over \$200 million. Adding \$11 million to that figure will allow for deployment of a nutrient monitoring net as well as one year of sensor operation funding. \$6 million being added to the USGS baseline budget will allow for ongoing operation of the sensors in outlying years. This support will allow for the measurement of nutrient reduction activity across at least ten states. *Real-time water quality is essential to disaster response, and targeted investment.*

Therefore, Mayors urge Congress to \$11 million the USGS Water Resources Program baseline spending for FY 2024. Robust monitoring at this level will allow accurate measurement of infrastructure project effectiveness.

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. 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 spear-headed by a market built by SCF Marine. However, the Marine Highway designation for the entire Mississippi River that makes this work possible is expiring. New rules passed by Congress will make renewal easier.

With Marine Highway grants becoming accessible than ever before, it is critical Congress fund this program at a new historic level to complement the new infrastructure deployments from the Jobs Act and the IRA.

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.

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.

“The IRA includes \$27 billion for the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, \$5 billion for Climate Pollution Reduction Grants, and \$2.2 billion for conservation programs. But this new spending must be supported by smart policy.”

-Brad Cavanaugh, Mayor of Dubuque, IA



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 greatly impacting the global commodity supply chain.

MRCTI Priorities for 2023 Reauthorization:

- 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;
- 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;

Farm Bill authorization priorities continued:

- Strength 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)

Congressman Bennie Thompson (MS) introduced H.R. 4729, the Andrew J. Young Safeguarding the Mississippi River Together, or 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 believe the time is overdue for the Mississippi River to be elevated to its rightful place as a national priority.

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 for all ecosystem restoration projects.
- 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 Climate Adaptation and Resilience Strategy Act

H.R. 6461 and S.3531 (in the 117th Congress)

House Committee on Energy and Commerce

Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Background:

Devastating flooding throughout the Mississippi River Basin 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 administration.

The bipartisan National Climate Adaptation and Resilience Strategy (NCARS) Act of 2022 (H.R. 6461 and S.3531) was introduced during the last Congress 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 and Resilience 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 Climate Adaptation and Resilience Strategy as soon as possible to help communities like ours along 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.

Flood Resilience and Taxpayer Savings Act

H.R. 481 (in the 117th Congress)

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Background:

The Congressional Budget Office has reported that U.S. economic losses associated with heavy precipitation, storm surges, and hurricane winds could average \$54 billion every year and require Federal spending averaging \$17 billion per year. When many communities are forced to rebuild after a storm or natural disaster, to get reimbursement from the federal government they must build to the same level that was originally destroyed without taking into account long-term consequences without any calculation as to the future needs of the projects.

If the federal government takes into account, the future risk of floods being placed on the structure will ensure that the structure will not need to be rebuilt in the future and thus save taxpayers from continually rebuilding structures and ensuring that projects will meet the needs of the community for years to come.

Issue:

The bipartisan Flood Resiliency and Taxpayer Savings Act of 2020 (H.R. 481) was introduced to ensure that the federal government uses a cost-effective disaster risk management strategy to safeguard the nation's infrastructure, businesses, and communities, as well as conserve taxpayer resources. The bill will direct federal agencies to consider and plan for future flood risk as they evaluate spending federal dollars, including the entire lifespan of a project. The bill also requires agency leaders use the best available data about current and future flood risk including FEMA maps, as well as state and local data, hydrologic studies, and other information. Through the bill, this capacity can be applied to both current and future projects in flood-prone areas.

In the absence of concrete data, the bill requires agencies incorporate appropriate safeguards to shield communities from future damage and loss, including the use of structure elevation, hardening, nature-based systems, or other mitigation strategies. The insertion of nature-based solutions as well as on-the-ground flexibility makes this bill crucial for communities working to systemically reduce their risk.

Therefore, the Mayors are in full support of the Flood Resiliency and Taxpayer Savings Act as it will better protect our communities and ensure that future data informs projects to protect both rural towns and dense urban cities. The bill does not have any direct costs but will warrant that federal dollars are more effectively spent.

Resilient AMERICA Act

H.R. 5689 (in the 117th Congress)

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Background:

The Resilient AMERICA Act, with strong bipartisan support, was able to pass the U.S. House in 2022, but struggled in the Senate. The bill would return unspent funds from the federal Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to the Disaster Relief Fund for Pre-Disaster Mitigation programs, which help communities prepare and respond to disasters.

The bill would more than double funding for FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program which provides localities with resources to plan and implement hazard mitigation projects. It would also expand BRIC eligibility to private non-profits. To increase the ability of homes to withstand disasters, the legislation would fund resources and incentives for communities to retrofit houses and adopt modern building and construction codes. The bill would also expand the scope of the post-disaster Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to prevent utility outages during disasters and direct unspent HMGP funds to future disaster relief efforts.

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 has 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 Resilient AMERICA Act as it will provide invaluable resources to local government and greatly improve FEMA's disaster assistance.

Climate RESILIENCE Act

H.R. 6396 (in the 117th Congress)

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Background:

If your city faces an extended period of heat or cold weather that causes issues, the city is not able to receive a “major disaster” declaration by the federal government. This means that all the reimbursements that happen at the federal level to deal with these disaster declarations are not eligible. Further, it is often the most vulnerable such as the homeless, the elderly, and children are affected by these issues. As we have seen, in other parts of the country when cold weather hits a climate that is not accustomed to such temperatures, pipes breaking and other issues can cause major issues and substantial damage. Further, sustained high temperatures can be devastating to communities and vulnerable populations.

Further expanding the definition can also help with mitigative efforts to improve building insulation/HVAC systems, increase urban tree cover and green space, planning, and other activities. Cities being able to protect themselves from extremely high or low temperatures are a crucial part of protecting their cities and communities. These temperatures can have tangible impacts that can cause deaths and significant damage in a city. By having FEMA recognize these issues we will be able to better protect our communities.

Issue:

The *Climate Risk and Emergency Support in Livable, Inclusive, and Equitable Neighborhoods and Communities Everywhere (RESILIENCE) Act* was introduced early in 2022 to strengthen the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) approach to climate disasters by ensuring that extreme temperature events are included. The RESILIENCE Act will Improve FEMA's disaster definition to include extreme temperature events, like heat waves and freezes. The bill expands the list of eligible activities funded under FEMA's pre-disaster and post-disaster mitigation programs, including improving hazard resistance of structures, enhancing natural infrastructure, and working with community organizations to improve planning.

The bill further enhances the hazard mitigation planning process to better integrate states’, tribes’, and territories’ hazard mitigation planning into other mitigation planning processes. The bill also includes a focus on resiliency planning and investments. The bill further improves FEMA's definitions and cost-share eligibility requirements for disadvantaged communities and underserved communities to reduce the cost-sharing needed as well as financial and non-financial technical assistance for hazard mitigation planning.

Therefore, the Mayors are in full support of the Climate RESILIENCE Act as it is a crucial piece of legislation that will close a policy gap that has long allowed these extreme temperature events to not be a part of FEMA disaster assistance.

Water Data Act

H.R. 7792 (in the 117th Congress)

House Committees on Natural Resources; Transportation and Infrastructure; Agriculture; Energy and Commerce; Science, Space, and Technology; Armed Services

Background:

The Water Data Act will create a national framework for water data to support innovation and the development of next generation technologies to empower water managers on the ground. Unlike other nations, water has no direct home in the federal government. Water is managed in a disparate fashion across the United States government with various Departments and Agencies addressing various aspects of water and its impacts. This bill will use data to bring together the federal administration to improve the management and understanding of water.

The bill will also support consultation, coordination, and partnerships with stakeholders by permanently authorizing the Advisory Committee on Water Information. It will further establish a new grant program under the Department of the Interior to invest in improving water data in partnership with state, local, and other organizations. The bill will invest in next-generation water data technologies and tools to transform water management.

Issue:

Water is life. Yet across the country, communities are struggling to meet their basic water needs. From providing clean drinking water and growing crops to responding to historic droughts and floods. To tackle our nation's largest water challenges, our communities need access to the best science, data, and tools. This bill unlocks the power of data and technology to transform water management by addressing long-standing technical issues in how water data are collected and shared through investing in innovation and new technologies. The Water Data Act will create a national water data framework and bring federal agencies together with state and local entities, innovators, and water users to develop the tools that will transform water management across the United States.

The data and information that is provided to our cities by the US Geological Survey is invaluable to numerous city services. Along with improvement in technology, data management, and artificial intelligence, new data sources and federal management will allow our cities to better predict and anticipate changing and future water challenges. More information will allow cities and the federal government to respond sooner and anticipate issues like flooding, drought, and water quality.

Therefore, the Mayors are in full support of the Water Data Act as it is a crucial piece of legislation that will revolutionize how the United States manages water by means of creating a more permanent federal framework.

National Bottle Bill

House Committee on Energy and Commerce

Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works

Recycling Infrastructure Accessibility Act

H.R. 8183 and S. 3742 (in the 117th Congress)

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:

Bottle bill variations were considered in draft form during the 117th Congress, but never introduced. The agreed upon premise of the proposal would create a standardized bottle deposit system for the country. The bipartisan bill would only apply to beverage bottles with a deposit of 10 cents for bottles under 24 ounces, 15 cents for beverage bottles over that size.

Further, the bill would require minimum recycled content percentages in certain plastic beverage container types. The bill also sets out minimum post-consumer resin (PCR) requirements for new plastic beverage containers. The minimum starts at 25% by 2025, then 50% by 2030, 70% by 2035, and 80% by 2040. This would create a larger market for post-consumer-waste material at the municipal level and help support local recycling programs. The bill would also ensure unredeemed deposits are invested in collection infrastructure.

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 the passage of a bipartisan National Bottle Bill that will create a nationwide system for bottle deposits and ensure that producers increase the use of recycled content in their containers. Additionally, the Mayors urge passage of the Recycling Infrastructure and Accessibility Act to provide our Mayors with new recycling infrastructure.

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Co-Chair

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