

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 11, 2016

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Energy and Water
142 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Energy and Water
188 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Feinstein:

As you begin consideration of the Fiscal Year 2017 Energy and Water Appropriations bill, we urge you to consider inclusion of funding for the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP). This unique program has a dual function to ensure efficient navigation infrastructure and to protect the habitat of the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers—the Upper Mississippi River System (UMRS).


Recognizing the national significance of the UMRS, Congress authorized NESP in the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 to give the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers authority to integrate management of the river's navigation infrastructure with ecosystem improvements. The UMRS provides an efficient mode to safely carry bulk commodities and provide additional capacity. Shippers on the river currently move large volumes of agriculture, energy and manufactured products. However, undersized and aging infrastructure slows traffic and limits capacity.

NESP will modernize seven existing facilities with new locks and authorizes a number of smaller scale projects to improve the system's capacity. Investing in the program will revitalize the UMRS, create new construction jobs, and support workers at manufacturing facilities, ports, terminals and grain elevators. The domestic economy and consumers across the country will benefit from transportation cost savings associated with an efficient supply chain.


When NESP was authorized, river ecosystem restoration was linked to the program to underscore Congress' recognition that the UMRS is both a nationally significant ecosystem and critical commercial navigation system. Therefore, a diverse array of restoration tools will be used to restore backwater complexes, naturalize river flow in side channels, modify dam operation and reconnect floodplain, all while maintaining compatible navigational use of the river. These project elements will improve river resilience, water quality, fish and wildlife habitat and support a vital recreational economy.

Thank you for your consideration of funding for this program. Bipartisan support for NESP has spanned nearly a decade, but has not yet resulted in the program's smart infrastructure development and river ecosystem restoration. Funding NESP is a critical step in the implementation of a unique partnership between commercial, recreational and environmental advocates of our nation's inland waterways.

Sincerely,


Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Roy Blunt
United States Senator

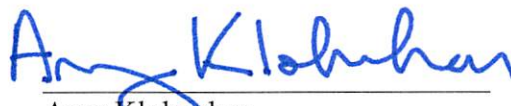

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