The Honorable R.D. James  
Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works  
Department of the Army  
108 Army Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20310

Dear Secretary James,

We write to request your continued support for investing in our nation’s aging waterway infrastructure, and respectfully urge you to direct the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to fund preconstruction engineering and design (PED) for the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP) on the Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway System in the Fiscal Year 2019 Work Plan, while simultaneously completing the economic update funded in the Fiscal Year 2018 Work Plan.

Congress authorized NESP in 2007, which integrates the needs of both navigation infrastructure improvements and ecosystem restoration into a single, multi-purposed program. This includes the construction of seven 1,200-foot locks at the most congested locations of the Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway in addition to structural efficiencies and needed improvements to the ecosystem throughout the Upper Mississippi River System.

Our nation’s inland navigation system provides a key strategic advantage to our nation’s agriculture and manufacturing sectors. Unfortunately, the reliability of the more than 80-year-old locks and dams that NESP would address will continue to decrease if NESP is not implemented. A single lock closure alone would trigger a shutdown of the entire system.

According to a National Waterways Foundation Study, lock closures have increased by 700 percent over the past decade. This study also concluded that a one year closure of the LaGrange Lock and Dam would negatively impact 18 states, increase transportation costs by $1.7 billion annually, and lead to a $2.1 billion loss in farm-dependent incomes. With more than 60 percent of our nation’s grain exports traveling through locks on the Upper Mississippi River System, we cannot afford to let this scenario become reality. NESP provides the opportunity to address these reliability issues and protect this infrastructure from catastrophic failure.

NESP directly impacts five states (Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin), as well as the entire Mississippi River, and is of national importance. NESP has the support of industry, labor, and conservation stakeholders, and enjoys wide bipartisan support. Funding NESP will result in both immediate and long-term benefits to our communities, and our nation. We therefore urge you to direct the Corps to resume and complete PED for this critical program.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,

Rodney Davis  
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum  
Member of Congress
Sam Graves  
Member of Congress

Dave Loebsack  
Member of Congress

Daniel W. Lipinski  
Member of Congress

Mike Bost  
Member of Congress

Adam Kinzinger  
Member of Congress

Cheri Bustos  
Member of Congress

James Comer  
Member of Congress

Richard M. Nolan  
Member of Congress

Rod Blum  
Member of Congress

Darin LaHood  
Member of Congress

Bruce Westerman  
Member of Congress

John Shimkus  
Member of Congress

Bob Gibbs  
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore  
Member of Congress
Jason Smith  
Member of Congress

Ann Wagner  
Member of Congress

Blaine Luetkemeyer  
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver, II  
Member of Congress

Rick Crawford  
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan  
Member of Congress

Randy Hultgren  
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress

Tom Emmer  
Member of Congress

David P. Roe, MD  
Member of Congress

F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.  
Member of Congress