



519 W. 9th Street, Hermann, Missouri 65041 (573) 690-2324

November 24, 2021

Colonel Geoff Van Epps
Commander, Northwestern Division
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
P.O. Box 2870
Portland, Oregon 97208-2870

Re: Missouri River Mainstem System
2021-2022 Draft Annual Operating Plan

Dear Colonel Van Epps:

The Coalition to Protect the Missouri River (CPMR) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Missouri River Mainstem System 2021-2022 Draft Annual Operating Plan (AOP). CPMR, established in 2001, is made up of nearly 30 members in six states and supports the responsible management of Missouri River resources, as well as the maintenance and enhancement of congressionally authorized purposes of the river, including flood control, navigation and water supply. We also support science-based habitat restoration for endangered or threatened species, provided that management actions are responsibly conducted and properly balanced with our members' interests.

CPMR appreciates the opportunity to review the draft AOP and ask questions of USACE staff during public meetings held in October. We applaud your efforts for personally attending each of these meetings and for the addition of St. Louis to the meeting schedule. We implore you to make this a permanent location due to the crucial impact the Missouri River has on the middle-Mississippi River and the great collaboration it fosters with USACE's Mississippi Valley Division.

We also appreciate USACE's commitment to release a final AOP in December so people that work alongside or directly on the Missouri River can plan accordingly. With low-water conditions forecasted next year, CPMR encourages USACE to do everything it can to support navigation as well as utility intakes and maintain robust communication with these key sectors to stay apprised of real-world impacts of its water management operations.

Upon our review of the draft AOP, we have the following comments and questions:

- 1) Human health and safety are paramount, and CPMR appreciates USACE's commitment to adjusting the AOP when substantial departures from expected runoff occur to keep intakes operational during periods of extended drought.
- 2) We applaud USACE's update and continued work to improve soil moisture and plains snowpack runoff forecasts by retrofitting Mesonet sites. CPMR requests that each AOP include an update on both new and retrofitted sites so stakeholders can continue to track progress of this important effort that will better inform USACE's flood control and water supply partners.
- 3) The draft AOP contains some contradictory language regarding flow operations for the interior least tern. Page 4 states: "*Flow operations for the interior least tern (tern), which were included in previous AOPs, and are similar to operations for the piping plover, are not included in this AOP, as the tern was delisted in January 2021.*" Page 10 goes on to read: "*For modeling purposes in the AOP, the Steady Release-Flow-to-Target (SR-FTT) regulation scenario for Gavins Point is shown during the 2022 tern and plover nesting season for Upper Quartile and lower runoff conditions.*" Further, page 16 states: "*Model runs included in this AOP have a Gavins Point release which is higher during the last 20 days of May to keep birds from nesting at low elevations.*"

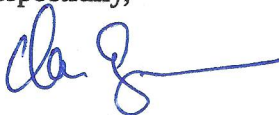
As we head into a forecasted lower runoff year, CPMR requests that USACE ensure extra water isn't being released to satisfy an Endangered Species Act (ESA) requirement that may no longer be necessary. At a minimum, USACE should provide further clarity on its Threatened & Endangered (T&E) Species operations. USACE should also be more precise by including exactly how much more water could be released in mid to late May so its partners can be as prepared as possible.

- 4) CPMR is pleased that the Fort Peck test flow releases for pallid sturgeon are not included under any runoff scenario in the draft AOP. We maintain our opposition to releasing water via the Ft. Peck Dam spillway for this experimental measure that could jeopardize human life and safety and has the potential to cause severe economic harm to local Missouri River irrigators.
- 5) Lastly, we reiterate our request for USACE to fully fund repairs to damaged navigation structures in order for flows to be used efficiently. This will be even more important in a year where we may be faced with minimum service navigation flow support.

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Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the draft AOP. Should you or your staff have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,



Dan Engemann
Executive Director

C: Beth Coffey, Director of Programs, Northwestern Division
John Remus, Chief, Missouri River Basin Water Management Division