



# Nebraska Chapter

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## **Basin-wide Sierra Club Positions on Missouri River Management**

*Developed at a Basin-wide Sierra Club meeting in Omaha, NE, June 15-17, 2001, and approved by Sierra Club chapters in every Missouri River Basin State and by the Regional Conservation Committees within the Basin. Modified at a Basin-wide Sierra Club meeting in Omaha, NE, April 3, 2004.*

### **1. Support native habitat restoration**

Discussion: This should be an over-riding goal of Missouri River Management, and all other management goals and recommendations should be subservient to this main management goal. The Sierra Club calls for establishment of equal project purpose for ecosystem management and restoration for the Missouri River System, as established within the authorities granted to the US Army Corps of Engineers under WRDA 1986. Legislation should be established requiring a reconnaissance study and working partnership with the states, federal agencies, and stakeholders. The legislation should follow the example of the working committees established under the Upper Mississippi/Illinois River Restructured Navigation Study. The aim should be to establish a fully funded program within four years of initiation of the Reconnaissance Study.

### **2. No new dams in the Missouri River basin**

Discussion: Current dams have caused major disruptions in the ecology of the basin. No new dams should be considered in any of the major or minor tributaries of the River.

### **3. No new levees that protect beyond “agricultural” level (5 year flood)**

Discussion: “Industrial” (100+ year protection) levees have separated the river from its floodplains - see #8 below.

### **4. Support basin-wide mitigation funding. The funding should be in response to an independently reviewed scientifically developed river ecosystem management and restoration plan.**

Discussion: The US ACOE has been authorized large amounts of funds to conduct mitigation efforts that will counter the negative impacts of the past decades of river management. The Sierra Club should support appropriations to the Corps targeted for such mitigation.

### **5. Support Conservation Easement funding**

Discussion: Short of outright purchases of floodplains and riverine wetlands (through such efforts as the USFWS’ Big Muddy Wildlife Refuge), easements could be purchased through WRP, EWRP, and other long-term or permanent set-aside programs.

## **6 species recovery**

Discussion: A component of any Missouri River management plan should be monitoring to ensure that the plan is contributing to habitat restoration, water quality improvement, and recovery of indigenous species - particularly those that are listed as “endangered”, but also to prevent habitat loss and consequent indigenous species decline. It is much easier to prevent species from becoming threatened or endangered than it is to recover species on the brink of extinction. This monitoring should be conducted by USGS, USFWS, and states’ fish and game management agencies.

## **7. Support Adaptive Management**

Discussion: This goes hand-in-hand with monitoring. If it is determined that some aspect of the management plan is not having the expected results, the Corps and other state and federal agencies should make adaptive changes to the management plan to address the problems. The adaptive management monitoring and subsequent recommendations for changes should be conducted by the US Geological Survey.

## **8. Reconnect floodplains and river - levee setbacks (one example)**

Discussion: The Missouri River should not be limited to a channel designated by the US ACOE, but rather should be allowed to expand into its floodplain during high-water events. “Industrial” levees should be set back sufficient distances (1500’ has been proposed) from the Ordinary High Water Mark to allow an escape valve for flood water, to replenish the floodplain and to allow restoration of the riparian corridor.

## **9. Support managing the Missouri River for other than navigational purposes. (See #1 above)**

Discussion 1: Cost-benefit analysis does not warrant management of river for navigation; barge traffic peaked in the ‘70s and has been in decline ever since, yet the Corps continues to manage the lower basin (below Gavins) for a non-existent barge industry (12% to 20% of original expectations). The results have been ecological destruction and loss of species throughout the basin and negative impacts upon upper-basin resources. Elimination of management for navigation would allow 1) restoration of a more natural lower river channel below Sioux City, 2) partial restoration of seasonal instream flows, and 3) elimination of a heavily subsidized and uneconomic system.

Discussion 2: We can find no evidence that navigational flows on the Mississippi River are in any way dependent upon Missouri River flows. Questions were directed to all state and federal agencies and none asserted that navigation on the Mississippi was related to the Missouri.

## **10. Support “unbalancing” the reservoirs**

Discussion: If the “split-season” flow regime is utilized, the flows from the upper basin reservoirs should be cycled, rather than drawing down one reservoir year after year. This will allow exposure of the sandbars and mudflats in the upper basin reservoirs on a cyclical basis, and should enhance nesting success for the endangered bird species - high reservoir levels should not be maintained on an ongoing basis. However, careful monitoring and adaptive management (see #7 above) should be utilized to ensure that the results of the unbalancing are positive.

**11. Oppose new bank stabilization because of the destruction of riparian habitat. However, we make exceptions for the protection of potential cultural and historical sites.**

Discussion: See #s 2, 4, and 8 above.

**12. Support setbacks for housing/residential developments - see statement on P&Z county protection, floodplain preservation, riparian zone protection, setbacks for aesthetics. Minimum of 100 year flood level.**

Discussion: Riverfront development is destroying the public ownership values of the Missouri River at an alarming rate; trophy homes built close to the river command a premium price but destroy riparian habitat and diminish the aesthetic quality of the river. Carefully planned zoning ordinances, when combined with federal incentive programs, can minimize many of the negative impacts of riverfront housing developments. These include setbacks for houses, screening of buildings using natural vegetation, and blending homes with natural topography. The Sierra Club supports and will work with local zoning boards and county commissions, as well as citizens groups, to secure and implement proper ordinances that focus on the public ownership values of the river.

**13. Support more dependence on natural systems - less on engineering**

Discussion: We prefer natural rivers and natural systems over manipulated ones. Unintended consequences of engineering “solutions” often create more problems than are solved.

[14. Internal Sierra Club recommendation: Need a Sierra Club entity to focus on Missouri River Basin (using Lewis and Clark Bicentennial funding, for example)]

**15. We support the “Split-Season” flow regime for spring high flows 1 of every 3 years, low summer flows each year. However, the “fall rise” is not historically nor ecologically justified.**

Discussion 1: We support flow modification to manage MO River for wetland communities, populations of all indigenous wildlife species, endangered species recovery, habitat restoration and recreation by higher spring rise, low summer flows. Fall flows should be determined by adaptive management reviews by the USGS with integral independent review and analysis.

Discussion 2: Fall rise is not justified by the historic hydrographic records and we consider it to be artificial and unnecessary; apparently it is advocated by the state and federal agencies to ensure sufficient flow for navigational interest. It is our position (see #9 above) that the River should not be managed for navigation.

Discussion 3: Low flow in summer should be sufficient to protect other interests (recreation, species, habitat restoration)

Discussion 4: Caveat: Flow modification should have little impact beyond 60 miles below Gavins - at least not from Sioux City on down. Natural flows from the rivers below Gavins Point provide attenuation of the impacts of flow releases from upstream.

Discussion 5: We view the “split season” flow regime as one quite small component of a return to a more natural river hydrograph. Too much emphasis has been placed on this component by upstream and downstream political interests.

## **16. Retirement of Gavins Point dam as a flood control or water retention structure.**

Discussion 1: As Gavins Point Dam approaches the end of its useful life due to the sediment buildup behind the dam, consideration should be given to the possibility of removal and restoring the sediment flows to the river.

Discussion 2: We support finding ways to redistribute the sediments and waterflows necessary to rebuild the natural communities of the entire lower Missouri River to the Gulf of Mexico.

Discussion 3: Short of physical removal of Gavins Point, it should become a “run of the river” structure (water in, water out).

## **17. Opposition to out-of-basin diversions**

Discussion: We oppose out-of-basins diversions that would potentially impact the historic natural fish and wildlife communities within the basin, or potentially introduce Missouri River basins species into other watersheds/basins.

## **18. Opposition to basin depletions**

Discussion: We oppose in-basin diversions where water does not return to river.  
Example: irrigation where large quantities are lost through absorption or evaporation.

## **19. Concerns about hydroelectric generation.**

Discussion: Water flows are highly variable in a natural river. Flows in a natural river exhibit peaks and valleys. The variability causes fluctuations in the ability to generate hydroelectric power. Due to the loss of hydroelectric power generation from adaptive management activities, the Sierra Club encourages the responsible development of wind and solar power as an alternative energy source during low flat periods.

## **20. Impacts of managing for recreation.**

Discussion: While supporting ecologically-sustainable recreation in the Mo R basin, we recognize the need to regulate recreational activities that negatively impact other values of the river. Jet skis (“ski-doo’s”), large high-powered personal watercraft, and other high-impact uses should be restricted to times or places where least harm is caused.

## **21 Concerns about Sturgeon fishing/harvest (inability of anglers to identify Pallid from Shovelnose).**

Discussion: Since it is difficult to distinguish sturgeon species, we encourage states to adopt North Dakota’s regulation. It forbids the taking of any species of sturgeon.

## **22.. Dredging - disruption of deposited sediment**

Discussion: While there exists dire need for redistribution of sediments (see #16 above), disruptions of sediments by dredging presents potentially serious water quality concerns. As such, dredging should only be undertaken ONLY when there will be NO negative impact on water quality.

## **23. We oppose the introduction of non-native species and support efforts to reduce current populations that have been previously introduced.**

Discussion: Wildlife and plants should not be introduced into habitats where they are not native when introduction may have adverse effects. Proposed wildlife and plant introduction and removals should be prohibited until an adequate research study is completed that indicates

whether or not such action will have an adverse effect on the natural ecosystem involved. The Sierra Club supports the removal or control of non-native species and rehabilitation and restoration of native ecosystems, unless it is no longer feasible to do so or there is not a documented conflict with the native ecosystem. (National Sierra Club policy adopted 12-10-94).