

# United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510-1304

November 19, 2018

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 highlight our strong support for improving our nation's water infrastructure by ensuring sufficient funding for the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP). NESP will improve navigation and provide important ecological restoration along the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers. We request that the Army Corps of Engineers fund preconstruction engineering and design (PED) for NESP in the Corps' Fiscal Year 2019 Work Plan while ensuring the timely completion of the project's economic update funded by the Fiscal Year 2018 Work Plan.

Congress, understanding the importance of the Upper Mississippi River System (UMRS), committed to improving the river system's navigation and ecosystems by authorizing NESP in the Water Resources Development Act of 2007. The UMRS is vital to our economy, with more than 60 percent of our nation's corn and soybeans exports traveling along the river system. It also plays a key role in transporting other commodities, moving 116 million tons of cargo annually.

The UMRS is a nationally significant ecosystem, supporting 25 percent of North America's fish species and almost 300 species of migratory birds. The river system has 16 national refuges, and attracts millions of recreational visitors each year. NESP will protect these ecosystems by restoring backwater complexes and naturalizing river flows, thus improving water quality and fish and wildlife habitat while supporting a vital recreational economy.

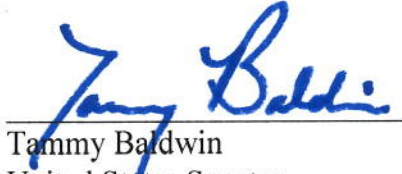
NESP will not only ensure that these ecosystems will continue to thrive, but will also reduce navigation hurdles, including lock closures, that plague our inland navigation system and cost billions in economic losses. UMRS's 1930 navigation infrastructure has well exceeded its design life, and improvements to the system are urgently needed.

NESP, since its inception, has been a bipartisan effort that has received support from environmental, industry, and labor groups. Funding NESP is critical to our economy and environment. We urge you to direct the Corps to provide funding to complete PED for this critical program.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



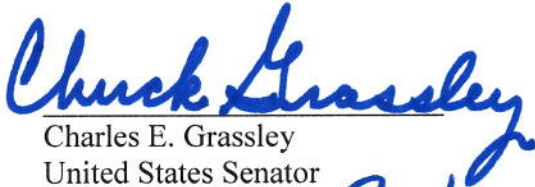
Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



Roy Blunt  
United States Senator



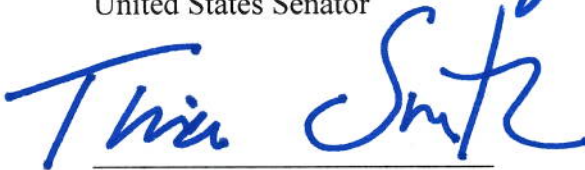
Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



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United States Senator



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United States Senator



Tina Smith  
United States Senator



Bill Cassidy  
United States Senator