

Uniting people, land and water across 31 states

America's GREAT WATERSHED

Initiative >>>



Outdoor recreational activities within the Mississippi River Basin contribute billions of dollars annually to the nation's economy. • The Mississippi River system is the most active waterway system in the U.S. for freight transport. • Agricultural products from the Mississippi River Basin are worth \$54 billion annually. © Mark Godfrey/TNC

America's Economic Engine

More than half the goods and services consumed by the citizens of the United States are produced with water that flows through the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Agricultural products from the Mississippi River Basin are worth \$54 billion annually and represent 92 percent of the nation's farm exports. The Mighty Mississippi serves as a vital conduit for goods, is home to the largest port in the U.S., and gives life to the Gulf of Mexico's vibrant seafood industry. Our rivers make possible commercial fishing and outdoor recreation that generate billions of dollars each year. Undoubtedly, the health of our nation's economy and people are directly tied to the decisions we make in managing the Mississippi River and its tributaries.

The Imperative

While there is much important work that should be addressed at smaller scales, we must also bring a collaborative, basin-wide perspective to the Mississippi River Watershed's greatest management challenges. This is the fundamental purpose of America's Great Watershed Initiative, or AGWI. Leaders recognize that geographic, institutional and issue-based silos have become barriers to achieving the economic, social and ecological potential of this vital watershed. We will miss global opportunities and fail in a costly fashion if state or smaller borders divide the management of this river system. And we'll fail if we address issues independently—if, for instance, we address water quality separately from water quantity, or land management separately from water management. Without new approaches, consider that by 2050:

- Rapidly escalating demand for water, caused by growing population and consumption, results in water scarcity in more than half the basin states.
- Floods on the Mississippi and its major tributaries threaten communities and the nation's economy.
- Global demand for corn, soybeans, wheat and cotton—which is expected to double—increases the risk of reduced water quality and quantity.
- The health of our communities and hundreds of thousands of jobs will be threatened without significant investments in infrastructure for waterborne transportation, water supply and sanitation.

State of America's Great Watershed

The socio-economic and ecological condition of America's Great Watershed is highly variable and never reported comprehensively. A more holistic understanding of the system is critical to a shared vision for sustainable management.

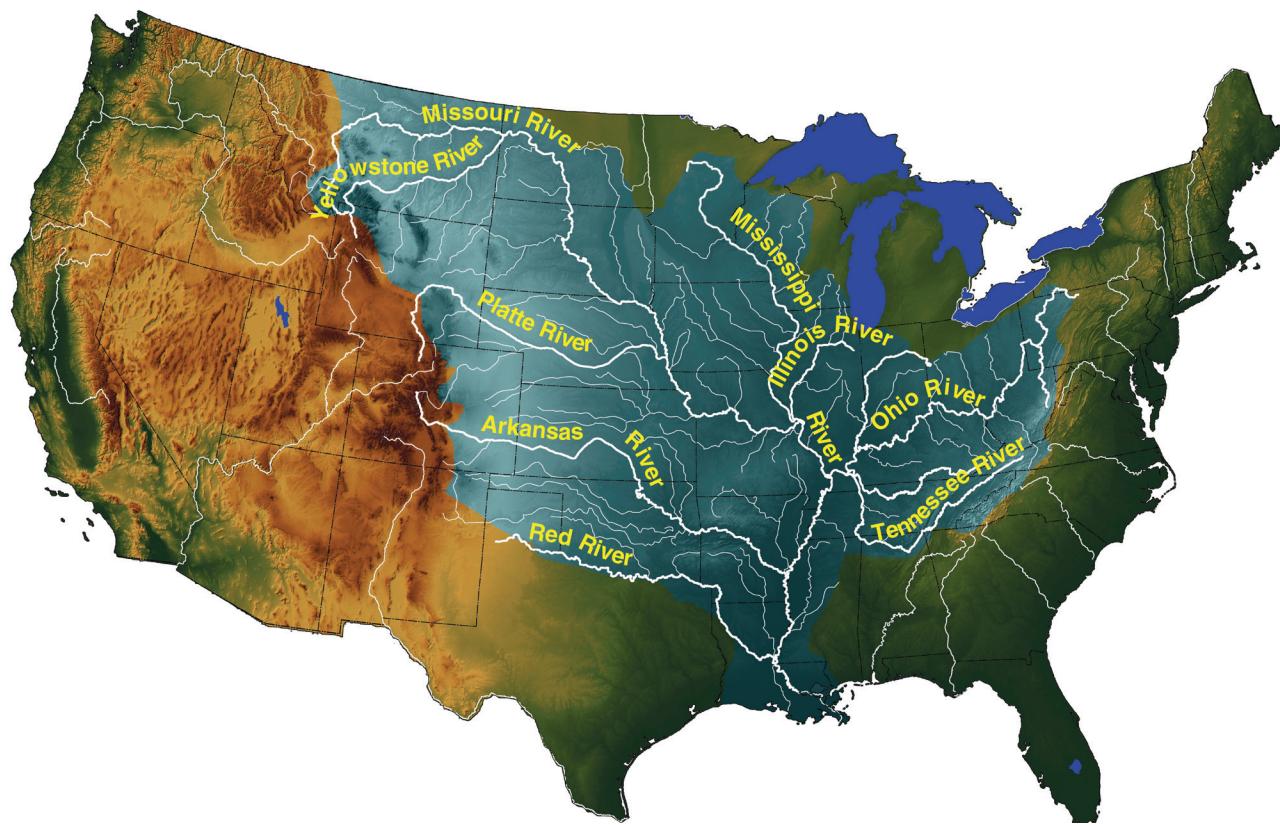
The **Upper Mississippi River** may have the most integrated management approach, but investments for needed ecosystem improvements as well as navigation and other water infrastructure are stalled. Agriculture is flourishing, yet data from the region documents poor water quality—which causes local challenges and affects the Gulf of Mexico.

The **Delta** has a highly functional flood control system and serves as a navigation corridor, but the region has degraded environmental conditions and significant infrastructure needs.

Coastal Louisiana is in a state of ecological collapse due to wetland loss. Its infrastructure, including the nation's most important port, is degrading, which ultimately will affect every American economically.

While floods ravaged the **Missouri River** in 2011, water scarcity is a looming issue. Conflicts among flood control, irrigation, power generation, endangered species, navigation and recreation complicate a unified vision.

The **Ohio River** may be the best example of coordination on water quality, but other water resource challenges remain, including insufficient investments in infrastructure.



The Mississippi River Basin, which drains all or portions of 31 states, is the third-largest watershed in the world. © U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Our Uniting Purpose

America's Great Watershed Initiative:

- Seeks to build and implement a vision based on **collaboration** and **mutually beneficial outcomes** in contrast to single-purpose advocacy.
- Helps find **solutions to issues that span multiple regions**—issues such as energy, transportation, water quality and more comprehensive flood management—while respecting vital work at smaller scales.
- **Builds upon strong leadership** and seeks to **link and augment successful efforts**, creating a broad partnership that can serve as a **unified voice** for the nation's watershed as a system.
- **Supports federal and state authorities**, while working to make their efforts more integrated and effective.
- Seeks to **leverage creativity that emanates from diversity** rather than being hampered by opposing viewpoints.

Key outcomes include:

- **Build recognition** among regional and national leaders about the importance of the watershed and the need for integrated management.

- Establish an enduring, public-private **facilitating entity** to connect existing institutions and stakeholders and harness the best science in service of a shared vision and more integrated management of the watershed.
- **Develop and report on measures** that indicate progress toward achieving the sustainable management and system-wide health of America's Great Watershed.
- **Elevate local and regional projects** that demonstrate effective collaboration and integrated strategies that help achieve system-level objectives.
- **Network** with river commissions and similar entities in North America and globally, establishing America's Great Watershed as a hub for **sharing knowledge and best practices** related to the management of large rivers and their watersheds.

Join Us

Decades of history have shaped this great river system, its economy and its culture. Now is our time! Please join us in this critically important endeavor. For more information, visit www.AGWI.org or call (970) 513-8340.

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