



Floodway dilemma gets Durbin's opinion, along with conservationists

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August 3 2015 1:31 PM



We appreciate Senator Durbin's strong commitment to protecting wetlands and conserving wildlife, as recently demonstrated by a letter he wrote to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) urging them to protect communities and habitats along the Mississippi River in Southern Illinois and Southeastern Missouri by vetoing the St. Johns Bayou- New Madrid Floodway project.

The project will cut off the last remaining area where the Mississippi River connects to its backwater floodplain in the state of Missouri. The project will drain an area of wetlands larger than the District of Columbia and eliminate the vital fish and wildlife habitat created when the river regularly spreads out into this floodplain area. U.S. resource agencies have properly concluded that this will cause substantial and irretrievable losses ~ losses that can't be mitigated. One senior reviewer of the project at the Army Corps of Engineers called it a "bad project. Period." Another called it "an economic dud with huge environmental consequences."

This \$165 million project will increase – not decrease – flood risks in the region by promoting more intensive agricultural development in an area that, by law, must be intentionally flooded to protect Cairo and other towns during large Mississippi River floods. The walling-off and draining of the last significant part of the state's floodplain that remains connected to the river, to improve production of cotton and soybeans, will happen on the taxpayers' dime. This will lead to increased flood damages in the Floodway itself, and will make it even more difficult to activate the New Madrid Floodway in a timely manner. Delays in activating the Floodway in 2011 have been implicated in the disastrous flooding of Olive Branch.

More than 20,000 members of the public, and dozens of community leaders, including Cairo's Mayor and Council members, have already joined the conservation community in calling for a Clean Water Act section 404(c) veto of the project.

We are pleased to see that our Senator opposes the project for the same reasons. Thank you, Senator Durbin for caring about Southern Illinois communities.