

January 24, 2024

Dear Members of the House of Representatives,

Our coalition of diverse organizations, businesses, professional societies, and state fish and wildlife management agencies collectively represents millions of Americans. We are writing to respectfully request your co-sponsorship of the Mississippi River Basin Fisheries Commission in the 117th Congress.

The Mississippi River Basin is the fourth-largest watershed in the world and the largest in the nation. The watershed drains all or part of 31 states and 2 Canadian provinces. The Basin covers more than 1.2 million square miles, approximately 41% of the continental U.S., and has nearly 1.5 million miles of waterways. There are more than 100 interjurisdictional rivers in the Basin that flow between or through two or more governmental agencies, and at least 90 fish species in the Mississippi River Basin that can come under interjurisdictional management. Despite the economic, ecologic, and social importance of interjurisdictional fishery resources in the Mississippi River Basin, and the complexity of managing sustainable recreational and commercial fisheries with the multiplicity of resource management authorities, there is no federally recognized interstate body or federal legislation to support cooperative fisheries management for the entirety of the Basin.

The Mississippi River Basin Fisheries Commission would provide a formal structure within the 28 states of the Mississippi River Basin to provide increased interagency, interstate, and inter-basin coordination and collaboration necessary for long-term sustainable management and utilization of interjurisdictional fishery resources in the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Aquatic invasive species (AIS), particularly invasive carps, quagga mussels, and zebra mussels, have become major issues impacting large river fishery resources in most Basin states and are placing increasing strain on agency resources for coordinated management and control efforts. The Mississippi River Basin Fisheries Commission will provide a mechanism for dedicated, stable funding for the responsible state and federal management agencies to conserve, restore, and manage native interjurisdictional fisheries; control invasive carp and other aquatic invasive species; and conduct critical research necessary to support fisheries management in the Basin.

The Mississippi River Basin Fisheries Commission is needed to ensure a cooperative and structured approach for basin wide interagency planning between state wildlife agencies (currently represented through the Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association "MICRA") and federal agencies such as, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the United States Geological Survey (USGS), and the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), for the implementation and evaluation of fishery management actions and critical research to restore aquatic habitat, control AIS, conserve imperiled native aquatic species, and provide long-term sustainable recreational and commercial fishing opportunities in the Basin.

The Mississippi River Basin Fisheries Commission will also ensure increased support and commitment by each agency to a cooperative, multi-agency approach to the management of interjurisdictional fishery resources in the Basin.

The Mississippi River and its tributaries comprise one of the largest and most valuable ecosystems in the world. The Basin supports vibrant and diverse recreational sporting activities and commercial fisheries. Economic output from recreational fishing in the Basin in 2011 exceeded \$19 billion (USFWS unpublished data). Habitat degradation, AIS, and the multiplicity of aquatic management authorities complicate and threaten the supply and utilization of these stocks. The economic threat from invasive carps to the recreational and commercial boating and fishing industries, as well as local and regional economies, cannot be overstated. Jumping invasive carp even jeopardize the physical safety of boaters and individuals on waterways, degrading the Basin's recreational appeal. The Mississippi River Basin Fishery Commission is urgently needed for improved cooperative, interagency management of interjurisdictional fishery resources, including to better coordinate and direct basin wide efforts of state and federal agencies in the fight against invasive carp to improve the effectiveness of federal investments in the Basin.

We thank you for your support of America's fish and wildlife and look forward to working with you to enact this groundbreaking legislation.

Sincerely,

Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association