

River

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ond, or about 1.1 million gallons of water per second. Fort Randall Dam at Pickstown was right behind with 157,000 cfs.

"Following last year's flooding, we talked about 'flood control,' but there is no such thing. The only such thing is managed flood risk," Fretz said.

"Right now, there is complete reliance on dams and levees. Our position, at American Rivers, is that it should be our last line of defense, not our only line of defense."

Fretz called for a priority of using floodplains and wetlands to absorb and store flood water.

"American Rivers and a lot of partners are advocating for a more holistic and natural approach for managing floods in general," she said. "We are looking at giving the river a bit more room to accommodate floods."

The approach requires a change from current thinking, Fretz said.

"Rather than just making some changes to the (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers') master manual, or just saying we need to hold more water in upstream reservoirs, we need to look at the entire basin and how we manage our flood plains," she said.

PRESENTING A PLAN

As part of that effort, leaders of several national and regional conservation groups will hold a press conference at 10 a.m. today at Clay County Park near Vermillion. The groups will make a major environmental announcement concerning the Missouri River.

The groups include American Rivers, Izaak Walton League of America (IWL), Sierra Club and Nebraska Wildlife Federation.

"League members want to see riverine habitats restored on portions of the Missouri River enabling fish and wildlife populations to become self-sustaining," said the IWL's Paul Lepisto of Pierre.

"This will result in a healthier river system that will provide wide-ranging benefits, including increased flood control, to all people in the Missouri River basin."

The flood spotlighted the need for new flood-management strategies, said Jim Redmond with the Sierra Club in northwest Iowa.

"Working to return the Missouri River to a healthy and functioning state, conservation organizations are thankful that the flood that citizens suffered June, July, and August of 2011 did not cost dozens of lives," he said. "And we are thankful that Missouri River basin residents now recognize the limits of levees, the narrow channel, and the reservoir system."

"Whatever infrastructure the engineers have provided us, the river needs functioning floodways, wetlands, grasslands and floodplain to achieve the risk reduction so vital in the climate change era."

The Missouri River has produced interstate battles, but the flooding has united residents along the river, said Caroline Pufalt of the Missouri Chapter of the Sierra Club.

"Our management and care of the river needs to be planned with a multi-state, watershed view," she said.

MEETING MANY NEEDS

The Missouri flows 2,300 miles and is the nation's longest river. Serving a number of critical needs, the river supplies drinking water, commerce and recreation, along with impacting the safety and well-being of millions.

The 2011 flooding emphasized how the river has been harnessed into a series of massive reservoirs on the upper river and a narrow, deep channel on the lower river, Fretz said. The channelization has made flood damages worse, putting communities at higher risk, she said.

American Rivers and its partners also call on Congress and the Corps to fully fund programs that would result in natural flood protection, Fretz said.

Those programs include the Missouri River Recovery Program (MRRP), Missouri River Ecosystem Restoration Plan (MRERP)

and Missouri River Authorized Purposes Study (MRAPS).

"In this case, the Missouri River is seeing Congress attempt to stop funding for restoration of the river and the long-term planning effort," Fretz said.

Those parties believe river management should completely focus on flood control and pull funding for other programs, she said.

"We think it's the wrong way of looking at it," she added.

Congress already restricted funding last year for the MRERP and MRAPS programs, so the Corps hasn't requested money for those two studies in fiscal year 2013, she said.

The Corps did request money for MRRP, but there have been efforts in Congress to redirect the funds for work on the mainstem dams, Fretz said.

"We're not saying they shouldn't do maintenance on the dams and levees. We need to do that," she said.

However, American Rivers would like to see the recovery money focused on flood plain restoration and other flood management efforts, she said. In turn, funding for dam and levee maintenance could come from other sources, she added.

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

The Missouri River is no stranger to the Top Ten List, according to American Rivers spokeswoman Amy Kober. The river was named one of America's Most Endangered Rivers® in 1994-2002 because of the threats posed by dams, flood control, agricultural runoff, navigation and bank stabilization.

"We began this list in 1986, and the Missouri River has been on the list more than any other river in the history of our operation," she said. "This year, it's on the list again."

Kober emphasized the fourth place ranking on the list is not a reflection on the Missouri River's water quality. The rivers are nominated for the list by local groups or individuals who fear for the rivers' future, she said.

"It's not the list of worst or most polluted rivers," she said. "These rivers are at a crossroads

in the coming years. They are at a critical decision point that will help influence whether the river is a healthy river or not. It also affects the communities along the river."

In this case, the 2011 flood provided a major, life-changing look at the river and how dangerous it became in a short amount of time, Kober said.

"It's been a major wake-up call for a lot of folks," she said. "We are calling on Congress and the Army Corps (of Engineers) to fully fund some key programs that would impact public safety and river health at the same time."

Fretz admits the effort can become a political football, particularly with the Corps facing eight authorized uses for the Missouri River. The Corps must also meet mandates regarding endangered

species, she said.

However, new ways must be found to meet needs beyond a narrow view of flood control, she said.

"Otherwise, the farmers won't be happy because they need some irrigation. The navigation won't be happy. The recreationists using the river for fishing and boating won't be happy," she said. "They need an inclusive effort that involves all the stakeholders and the use of science in determining what should be in the authorized purposes study."

Along those lines, American Rivers has also worked with the Missouri River Association of States and Tribes (MORAST), Fretz said.

Time exists for finding a solution to flooding, she said. "They aren't projecting a big flood for

this year, so we don't need a knee-jerk reaction just because of one year," she said.

People realize a healthy river benefits not only fish and wildlife but also recreation and the local economy, Kober said.

"People will be talking about the Flood of 2011 for generations," she said. "We are hoping to channel some of that into real improvements for the river and flood policy that will impact the Missouri River."

For more information, visit online at americanrivers.org/endorserivers. The site will contain maps, information, pictures and ways to help the river.

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at twitter.com/RDockendorf

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Friday

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Saturday

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8:00

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