



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
CORPS OF ENGINEERS, OMAHA DISTRICT
215 NORTH 17TH STREET
OMAHA, NEBRASKA 68102-4978

November 6, 2000

Planning, Programs, and Project Management

Mr. Jim Salyer
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Southern Missouri Ascertainment Office
24385 State Hwy 51
Puxico, Missouri 63960

Dear Mr. Salyer:

I regret the late submittal of these comments to the Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan for DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge and appreciate your request for these even at this late date.

We support Objective 1.7.1, an assessment of re-connecting at least a portion of DeSoto Lake to the Missouri River; and we would encourage a decision to re-connect the lake to the river to help in the recovery of that troubled river's ecosystem. DeSoto Lake was created by channelization of the Missouri River at a time when national priorities were different than those today. The impacts from channelization have included major degradation of the Missouri River ecosystem. Today, to restore lost habitat, the Corps is implementing a required Mitigation Project for that channelization project and is conducting environmental modifications of the channelization project with non-Federal partners who are willing to share the costs under our Sec. 1135 authority. We are finding our river operations impacted and also finding our operating budget may be increasingly used to assist endangered river species that have declined due to loss of habitat diversity. The Corps is currently in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) relative to the operation of the Missouri River Main Stem Reservoir System, Bank Stabilization Project, and Kansas River Project.

Opportunities for restoration are scarce, particularly in this upstream reach. Reconstruction of backwater conditions is very expensive, as each acre of habitat must often be excavated. DeSoto Lake offers a remarkable opportunity to restore river diversity at low cost. USFWS is in a unique position to make a contribution to river restoration, which virtually all involved agencies recognize as being a need paramount to sport fish management. We would encourage USFWS to join its authorities and programs with those of the Corps and others for Missouri River restoration activities.

Restoring connectivity between the river and its off-channel remnants and flood plain is one of the two main restoration needs frequently sought by river researchers and managers in this region (the other being restoration of a more natural hydrograph). Also, the most frequently recommended strategy for river conservation during at least one symposium of river biologists was the protection and restoration of riparian forests and wetlands. Wetlands, including oxbows, are considered essential to providing the habitat, nutrients, and substrate which support the river fishery and drive the aquatic food chain. And specifically, re-connecting DeSoto Lake to the



-2-

Missouri River was well supported by those attending your office's interagency scoping meetings for this Conservation Plan, as reflected in Chapter 2, "Issues" section.

A re-connection project could still allow your office to achieve other objectives. Proper design could ensure that any lake portion left disconnected from the river would remain structurally segregated for sport fish management. The portion not re-connected would be much cheaper and easier to renovate for rough fish control. A re-connection project could assist flood damage reduction within the refuge.

Under our available authorities, the Corps stands ready to assist you in achieving your refuge objectives, hopefully to include some reconnection of DeSoto Lake to the Missouri River. We may be able to offer assistance under our Federal Mitigation Project, with possible future operation expenditures, or with our cost-shared Sec. 1135 program.

Thank you for considering our recommendations.

Sincerely,


Kenneth S. Cooper
Deputy District Engineer

Copies Furnished:

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