

Lower Mississippi River *Fisheries Coordination Office*



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Station Facts

- Established: 1994.
- Number of staff: one.
- Geographic area covered: Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee.

Station Goals

- Provide a permanent forum for facilitating the management of the aquatic natural resources of the Lower Mississippi River leveed floodplain.
- Restore and enhance aquatic habitat in the Lower Mississippi River leveed floodplain and tributaries.
- Increase public awareness and encourage sustainable use of the Lower Mississippi River's natural resources.
- Promote natural resource-based economic development.
- Increase technical knowledge of the Lower Mississippi River's natural resources.

Services provided to:

- Project leader serves as coordinator for the Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee (LMRCC); LMRCC is an organization of 12 State conservation and environmental quality agencies charged with natural resource management in the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley; cooperators include Federal/state agencies, private entities, industry and grant-making organizations.
- Public.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency.
- Conservation organizations.

Activity Highlights

- Development of an Aquatic Resource Management Plan to restore natural resources in the 2.7 million-acre, leveed floodplain of the Lower Mississippi River.
- Publication of the LMRCC Newsletter, a regional newsletter on aquatic resource conservation management issues, and natural resource-based economic development.
- Provide long-term economic, environmental, and public recreation benefits to the region by cooperatively addressing aquatic resource management issues.

Questions and Answers:

What does your office do?

The Lower Mississippi River Fisheries Coordination Office (FCO) coordinates the work of many different state and Federal natural resource management and environmental quality agencies that deal with the Lower Mississippi River aquatic resource issues.

Why is the Lower Mississippi River important?

The Mississippi River is the fourth longest river in the world, flowing for more than 2,350 miles from its headwaters in Lake Itasca, Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico. Its 1.2 million square mile watershed includes about 41 percent of the continental United States and a small area of Canada.

Of the world's rivers, the Mississippi River has the third largest drainage basin, produces the seventh highest average discharge, and is generally accepted as one of the rarest and most complex riverine ecosystems. More than one billion tons of commodities, including more than 50 percent of the nation's grain production, are moved annually on the Mississippi River.

The Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley, comprised of portions of Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana, stretches for 954 river miles south from the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers near Cairo, Illinois to the Gulf of Mexico.

At its mouth, the Mississippi River nourishes 4.5-million acres of coastal prairies and marshes, which are an ecological extension of the forested alluvial valley. Together they form a wetland complex of unrivaled scope in the temperate zone of the western hemisphere. Unlike the 1,380 mile reach of the Upper Mississippi River which is constrained by 29 locks and dams, the Lower Mississippi River is free flowing.

Historically the Lower Mississippi River overflowed onto a 30-125 mile wide alluvial valley and, along with its tributaries, encompassed the largest floodplain fishery in North America. Because the river was continually creating and abandoning channels in its 15-30 mile wide meander belt, the area was interspersed with permanent and seasonal wetlands. These wetlands flooded shallowly for extended periods almost annually, and there was a great diversity of aquatic habitat types. More than 150 species of fishes were present.

What is the Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee?

National recognition of the sustainable environmental, social, and economic values of natural resources has stimulated significant interest in the multiple-use management of large rivers. The Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee was formed in 1994 by representatives of the natural resource conservation and environmental quality agencies in the states of Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Louisiana.

Significant assistance in the committee's formation was provided by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency. Formation of the organization was precipitated by the increasing concerns of natural resource managers regarding the cumulative losses and decreasing diversity of aquatic habitat as well as the declining fisheries resources in the Lower Mississippi River leveed floodplain.

A full-time coordinator assigned to the Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee by the Service reports directly to the Executive Committee. His primary duties include assisting the Chairman and eleven-person Executive Committee in providing a permanent forum for facilitating cooperative activities to restore the natural resources of the Lower Mississippi River, and natural resource-based economic development.