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**TESTIMONY:
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS
FULL COMMITTEE FIELD HEARING
MISSOURI RIVER MANAGEMENT: DOES IT MEET THE NEEDS OF SMALL BUSINESS?
ST. JOSEPH, MISSOURI**

Chairman Graves and members of the United States House Committee on Small Business:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony regarding management of the Missouri River and the needs of small businesses. As Vice-President of the Missouri Levee and Drainage District Association, I represent levee and drainage districts, businesses, associations and individuals interested in the activities and issues surrounding the Missouri River and its tributaries. I understand the importance of this committee's work as it relates to the protection of small businesses across our country. I am honored to have this opportunity to provide comments on behalf of the levee association's membership and fellow Missourians who are impacted by the operation of the Missouri River.

The bottomlands along the Missouri River include thousand of acres of highly productive farmland. Many family farm businesses rely on levees constructed by landowners, levee districts and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for protection from flooding. 100,000 acres of Missouri bottomland soil can produce enough calories to feed over 1 million people for an entire year. This productive soil makes up the backbone of the local economy. As the bottomland farms succeed, so does the local economy. There are spillover impacts from the success of the farm businesses. Many small businesses benefit from the production and operation of bottomland farms. The purchases of tractors, trucks, and other machinery, along with labor and other inputs have ripple effects throughout our economy.

I want to be very clear; it is the productive soils and the land that provides the foundation for small business growth and success throughout our agricultural communities. Without the highly productive soil and land the small businesses in the fruitful Missouri River bottoms would be far less successful. We have seen dramatic increases in farmland values over the past several years. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, first quarter farmland values in the Kansas City District have posted double-digit annual gains for three straight years. While the general economy has struggled, agriculture and small businesses tied to agriculture have held their own. Agriculture will likely be the industry leading our country out of its economic woes. It has held true in the past. This is why it is vitally important to keep our best soils in production and this is why we should protect these soils from flooding.

Flood control is vitally important to these businesses. Small businesses in the economic chain, from the farmer to the small businesses he impacts, rely on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to provide critical flood control along the Missouri River. Flooding has huge impacts on small businesses and the economy. Because floods are so devastating, flood control is one of the greatest needs for communities and small businesses impacted by Missouri River operations.

Unfortunately, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers no longer seems to share the same belief concerning the importance of flood control for the small businesses impacted by their operations. In fact, we rarely even hear the Corps talk about flood control. The term flood control has all but been stripped from their vocabulary. Instead of flood control, we now hear the Corps talk about flood risk reduction. The Corps of Engineers is working hard on programs designed to reduce the federal government's risk and responsibility associated with flooding and flood recovery. But there is very little focus on actually reducing the risk of flooding.

The Corps' new approach to flood control has little to do with keeping the River between its banks. Their emphasis is on moving people and businesses out of the floodplain, buying productive farmland, setting back or removing levees and allowing the River to run wild. This is not an approach to flood control. It is a recipe for disaster.

We understand floods will happen and we cannot control every flood. But the goal should be to keep the River between its banks and control flooding as much as possible. Even if we were able to remove all infrastructure from the floodplains, (homes, businesses, roads, power lines, pipe lines, bridges and more), the remaining farmland is worth protecting with levees and other flood control projects.

Members of the Missouri Levee and Drainage District Association have many concerns regarding the Corps' operation of the River. Shallow Water Habitat projects, Dike Notching, the threat of a manmade Spring Rise each year and land acquisition programs top the list of concerns. The Corps levee inspection program and the FEMA levee certification program also concern our members and will have impacts on small business and the ability to provide proper flood control.

Finally, it is our hope your committee and the United States Congress will provide better oversight of the Corps of Engineer's activities. Federal agencies with no oversight from congress have a long leash and high level of arrogance. This has been the case with the ongoing Shallow Water Habitat projects. Even though the Missouri Clean Water Commission decided not to provide a 401 certificate, the Corps of Engineers has decided to dump dredged spoils from their projects directly into the Missouri River. We believe this shows a great lack of respect to the Missouri Clean Water Commission and the stakeholders who overwhelmingly opposed the soil dumping.

The work of your committee is very important. I appreciate your service to our nation and your willingness to hold this hearing here today. I hope you will encourage the Corps of Engineers to make flood control their number one priority and provide the protection the small businesses need to grow and prosper. The land and productive soils along the Missouri River is one of our country's greatest assets. Providing flood control to the land is critical to small businesses throughout the Missouri River Valley and the nation. The Missouri Levee and Drainage District Association is ready and willing to help you as we work together to protect our small businesses and grow our economy.

Thank you,

Lanny Frakes, Vice-President
Missouri Levee and Drainage District Association