

# Missouri River discussed

**The new effort aims at a consensus for the river's users to help endangered species.**

By **BILL GRAHAM**  
The Kansas City Star.

Decades of feuding among states, industries and interest groups won't make the job easy.

But creating a biologically healthier Missouri River drew delegates this week to Kansas City who are organizing a group aimed at more progress with less friction.

It's dubbed the Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee.

Organizers hope representatives from diverse river users — from utilities to fishermen — can reach consensus on how to help endangered species such as the pallid sturgeon without wiping out struggling businesses such as barge haulers.

The committee will not dictate policy, but its members will develop recommendations.

"If this group can come to a consensus on issues, it can become a very powerful voice," said Mike Eng, senior program manager for the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution.

The federal institute helps public agencies and private parties resolve environmental or land management policy conflicts.

An agreement signed by the Corps of Engineers with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service required the creation of the Recovery Implementation Committee, said Mary Roth, a spokeswoman for the corps.

On Wednesday, the committee began organizing as part of the weeklong National Conference on Ecosystem Restoration at the Hyatt Regency Crown Center hotel. A committee

charter is coming together this year, and meetings on river management policy will probably start next year, Eng said.

"This provides a basis for collaboration on recovery activities that includes public values, a broad range of stakeholders and provides consensus-based recommendations," he said.

The corps already is notching dikes and rejoining backwaters to the river to create more habitat for the endangered pallid sturgeon fish and other river dwellers. Dam building and channel modifications during the past decades harmed their habitat. Special programs also are under way to help endangered piping plover and least tern birds nesting on river sandbars from Nebraska northward.

But the river's natural ecosystem remains greatly altered, and the Recovery Implementation Committee will work with

agencies and businesses to continue fish and wildlife habitat restoration.

Kansas is one of the states participating, Eng said.

However, some private agriculture and barge shipping interests in Missouri have so far declined to participate in the committee, saying they fear its membership will be tilted toward upstream states. Missouri officials have yet to commit to the project for the same reasons, according to a letter Gov. Matt Blunt sent to the corps in March.

Eng said building trust is a committee goal.

"There have been ongoing discussions to see what we need to do to get them to participate," he said of Missouri. "We're still quite hopeful that they will choose to participate."

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