



## A NATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE FLOODS OF 2008

### American Rivers' Eight Point Plan

The recent floods in the Midwest demand action – by the American public, the U.S. Congress and by local authorities.

As recently as 1993, similar floods in this region produced widespread destruction and loss of life. In the wake of that tragedy, many experts, including American Rivers, called for a new course for managing floods. While some communities and government agencies responded others proceeded with business as usual. Many actions actually increased flooding risks along the Mississippi and its tributaries, making the damage from the recent flooding far worse than it needed to be.

This year's flooding marked the second "500-year flood" in less than two decades. Overwhelming scientific consensus is that climate change means more severe and more frequent weather events, including more record-breaking floods. This further underscores the need to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but also emphasizes the need to act quickly to buffer ourselves from future harm.

To help today's flood victims, we urge the public to support relief organizations such as the American Red Cross and other reputable charities that are providing disaster assistance to the affected communities. We've reached out to our members, posted a link on our website, and we urge others to do the same.

Further, we must take bold action to prevent families and communities from becoming tomorrow's victims. To address the ongoing threat of flooding to communities throughout the Midwest and across the nation, American Rivers recommends the following eight steps:

1. **Get People Out of Harm's Way** - Congress must double the current annual funding for flood relief in FEMA's Repetitive Flood Claims and Severe Repetitive Loss programs in the pending National Flood Insurance Modernization Act. These programs pay for mitigation of properties that have had a history of repetitive flood insurance claims. Both programs are set to expire in 2009 and Congress must act to reauthorize and expand these vital programs. Congress also should consider establishing a federal tax rebate to property owners that have relocated structures out of designated flood plains.
2. **Stop Further Wetland Destruction** – Before they issue any further permits to fill wetlands, state and federal agencies must demonstrate that the cumulative impact of issuing those permits does not increase flooding in downstream communities. Natural wetlands provide communities with a buffer that can absorb and attenuate floodwaters. An acre of wetland can absorb 1-1½ million gallons of water. To restore the historic scope of protections to small streams and wetlands that provide critical flood protection, Congress should immediately enact the Clean Water Restoration Act of 2007.

3. **Restore What's Been Lost And Damaged** – The health of the Mississippi River is in dire straits. The river's floodplain is severely degraded, its islands are eroded, its backwaters have filled in, and the river's natural flows have been severely disrupted. This damage has greatly reduced the river's natural ability to attenuate flooding and has caused many additional adverse impacts to river communities. Congress should fully fund, and ensure effective implementation of, the \$1.8 billion comprehensive restoration plan authorized for the Mississippi River in 2007.
4. **Scrutinize Our Levee System** - Congress must invest in levee safety. Communities that have developed behind levees have the right to know the condition of these structures. In November 2007, Congress passed the National Levee Safety Program Act, but failed to provide adequate funds. The law must be fully funded at \$120 million over six years. State legislatures should require that property sale disclosures clearly state whether a property is located in a known residual risk area (i.e., within the failure zone of a dam, levee or other man-made structure). California is the only state in the nation implementing this common sense requirement.
5. **Do No Harm** - Congress should prohibit the construction of new navigation structures and new levees until the Army Corps of Engineers ensures that those structures will not increase flooding downstream. Scientific studies have shown that these structures have increased flood heights in some parts of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers by five to ten feet. Our response to the Flood of 2008 must not place downstream communities at increased risk during the next flood.
6. **Recognize the Risk of Global Warming** - Congress must pass an updated version of National Flood Insurance Modernization Act that recognizes the impact of global warming on flooding. The legislation should ensure communities are protected by: prohibiting all new development within the 100-year floodplain; requiring the depiction of all residual risk areas on flood hazard maps; requiring mandatory flood insurance for all properties within residual risk areas and providing finance assistance for affected low-income residents. FEMA also must begin to incorporate climate change forecasts in determining the extent of the 100 and 500 year floodplain.
7. **Protect Farmland** – Farmers across the Midwest have made a major commitment to helping protecting communities from floods through Farm Land Conservation programs. The federal government must honor and enforce past commitments to the program, and not encourage or allow some farmers and agribusiness companies to now opt out. In the Midwest, more than 106,000 acres of land was removed from the program in 2007 and 2008; land that could have helped to absorb this recent round of floods.
8. **Provide Relief for Farmers** - Congress should provide \$2 billion in emergency funding for incentives for the production of “flood-friendly” crops. The recently enacted Farm Bill puts the priority on energy production as opposed to protecting communities, farmers and cropland from floods. Incentives for the production of flood-tolerant crops such as switchgrass would better meet the nation's interest in biofuel production while simultaneously protecting critical floodplains.

For more information about the Midwest Floods and American River's recommendations, please contact Andrew Fahlund, Vice President of Conservation, American Rivers (202) 347-7550