



**Opening Statement
Chairman Sam Graves
Committee on Small Business
Hearing: “Missouri River Management: Is It Meeting the Needs of Small Businesses?”
August 21, 2013**

Good morning. This hearing is called to order.

I would like to thank everyone for appearing at today’s hearing to discuss the implications of Missouri River Management to small businesses.

As Chairman of the House Committee on Small Business, I encourage the use of field hearings. It allows Members to get out of that bubble that is 17 square miles of logic free thinking called Washington, D.C. so that we can listen to the real concerns of real small businesses operating in the real economy.

From the beginning of the late 19th century, the federal government has taken an interest in developing our nation’s waterways in order to maximize the economic benefits of these resources to the United States. The original federally authorized purpose of the Missouri River System was to facilitate navigable waters for interstate commerce. Later, flood prevention, water supply, irrigation and hydropower were added to the mix, again for the purposes of maximizing the economic benefits of the river.

Unfortunately, managing the river for economic benefits has become less important than facilitating other objectives of little or dubious economic value.

Today, the lower Missouri River is often closed to commercial navigation, reducing opportunities for small businesses to find the most cost effective means of shipping their goods. In addition, Corps programs to create shallow water habitat for a fish, the Pallid Sturgeon, and the proposed Spring Pulse could undermine the goal of flood prevention.

Some claim that these are unavoidable tradeoffs between balancing the potential economic benefits of the Missouri River System with the goal of protecting the environment. I believe that such thinking misses the point. Limiting the economic utility of the river system based on dubious science doesn’t promote any objective.

What small business and rural community stakeholders need is for management decisions to be based on accurate scientific and engineering data. Unfortunately, all too often, decisions with significant system-wide impacts appear to be based on a whim. This reduces certainty and makes it difficult for small businesses that rely on the river system for their economic well-being to plan accordingly.

Before I yield to witnesses for their opening statements, I would like to acknowledge the presence of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Committee invited both the Corps and the Fish and Wildlife Service to attend, but as we can see, only the Corps chose to testify.

This is unfortunate for several reasons, none more so than the fact that many of the regulations complicating multipurpose management of the Missouri River System originate or are influenced by policies pursued by the Fish and Wildlife Service. I think their absence speaks volumes about their lack of concern for small businesses and rural communities.

Ms. Farhat, thank you for appearing today. I also look forward to hearing from our other witnesses who have taken time away from their work to share their experience with the Committee.