

**July 2007 Progress Report  
Middle Mississippi River Regional Corridor Study  
St. Louis District**

The Middle Mississippi River Regional Corridor Study is a natural resource based collaborative planning effort focused in three areas: completion of regional reach assessments which will be used to help guide and focus future interagency natural resource planning, completion of a hydrogeomorphic (HGM) model to create a science-based ecosystem restoration planning tool for the region, and the development of collaborative regional natural resource planning goals.

**Accomplishments Since the Last VTC**

The study has made excellent progress over the last quarter on all three focus areas.

Since March we have conducted a series of five meetings focused on natural resource planning with regional stakeholders. The Middle Mississippi River is 200 miles in length. To make the effort more manageable, the river was divided into 40 mile reaches. Meetings were conducted with interested stakeholders in each reach. In a testament to the interagency commitment to this effort, each of the reach efforts is coordinated by a different agency or organization. At each meeting the attendees were asked to identify reach-level priorities, needs, opportunities, available data, ongoing and future actions, connections with other planning efforts, potential projects, and restoration priorities. The meetings were well attended, and included federal, state, local, and non-governmental groups. The diversity of the groups led to good information exchange at each of the meetings. The outputs of the meetings will be prepared as individual reach plans or assessments under a larger Middle Mississippi River reach assessment.

Work on the HGM model over the last quarter focused on identifying past and present ecosystem conditions within the region. Results of that work, to date, were presented to the regional stakeholders in early July.

Work is just beginning with the regional partners to establish regional natural resource goals, objectives, strategies, and development of metrics to measure success. The St. Louis District recently briefed the MMRRC interagency “steering committee” on a proposed framework and schedule for completion of the regional goals setting work.

**Expenditures**

The MMRRC effort has a completion date of August 2008. Based on expenditures, the study is about 40% complete, and is on schedule. All efforts are in full swing, with the exception of the regional goals work, which is scheduled to get underway in August 2007.

## **Lessons Learned/Challenges/Opportunities**

We recently concluded a series of meetings with the regional stakeholders. Participation in those meetings was generally very good, with a few exceptions. Most of the key resource agencies and NGO's have been strong participants in the study. It has been a challenge to get good involvement from one of the key agencies. This likely is a reflection of budget conditions and the organizational structure of that agency.

As an observation, as we have walked through the regional meetings it has become apparent that past regional planning efforts, and the products associated with those efforts, are not readily available or well distributed. This stresses the need for good dissemination and availability of our products, if our efforts are to have long ranging planning value to the region and to stakeholders.

One of the greatest benefits of the Corps effort has been the improved communication between stakeholders and the recognition of opportunities to work together that were not previously identified. The individual partner's understanding of the other's programs and capabilities is surprisingly limited. Bringing the groups together toward focused efforts has really improved inter-agency understanding, which will be one of the greatest benefits of the study.

## **Customer/Stakeholder Perceptions**

The Middle Mississippi River Partnership (MMRP), an inter-agency partnership of 20 federal, state, and non-governmental groups, held its annual meeting July 11-12. The progress and results to date of the Middle Mississippi River Study were a major focus of the annual meeting, with individual briefings on all three focus areas. Response and feedback into the Corps efforts have been extremely positive. Many of the products that our study will produce are what the regional partners and stakeholders felt were needed, or were the "next steps" to continue to move forward as a focused, collaborative group. Since inception, the study has enjoyed strong support from many of the regional stakeholders. This interest has manifested itself in the interest and participation in the reach assessment meetings and in the feedback and input we have received on the upcoming regional goals setting work.

Given the strength of the MMRP, the products and processes of the study should transcend the end of the formal study. As intended, many of the actionable items will be the responsibility of agencies other than the Corps. There is a strong sense of partnership and regional ownership within the MMRP, which will help assure that the outputs of the study are put to use.

One of the issues we continue to struggle with is access to the GIS products after the study ends. Both the reach assessments and the HGM work are heavily based on GIS data and products. Both will be powerful planning tools if they are in the hands of the regional natural resource managers or stakeholders. Given our expertise in GIS and watershed planning as an agency, we are the right stewards for that data. However, given

the hurdles that we face as a DOD agency, maintaining and allowing open access to the data doesn't appear practical. Toward that end, we have been talking with several agencies and NGO's about their ability to host and manage the GIS products of the study.

### **Upcoming Efforts**

Efforts between now and the end of the FY will focus on preparation of the draft reach reports (due in December), preparation of the draft HGM report (due in November), and preparation for the focused goals meetings with regional stakeholders (begin in August).

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Middle Mississippi Regional Corridor Study