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Missouri River Recovery Program: Fish and Wildlife Protection – Key to a Healthy River

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MISSOURI RIVER



US Army Corps
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R E C O V E R Y P R O G R A M

FISH AND WILDLIFE PROTECTION – KEY TO A HEALTHY RIVER

Fish and wildlife conservation on the Missouri River is one of the eight congressionally-authorized project purposes of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. In support of this, the Corps manages lands and waters to ensure its availability for future generations and to help preserve healthy ecosystems and biodiversity. This purpose originally focused on maintaining native and game species, but in recent years it has taken on renewed prominence with efforts to recover threatened and endangered species.

The Missouri River is a dynamic ecosystem, creating and maintaining important open water, sandbar, wetland, and forest habitat for a wide diversity of wildlife, including at least 301 species of birds, 156 species of fish, 60 species of mammals and 52 species of reptiles and amphibians. This fact sheet will describe important river habitats and the species that live in them. It will also discuss what the Corps is doing to protect fish and wildlife on the Missouri River.



Wetlands

Riparian

Riverine

RIVER HABITAT

The Missouri River, winding more than 2,300 miles from Montana to Missouri, contains a diverse mix of habitats:

Wetlands. Areas that are flooded by water long enough to support plants adapted for life in saturated soil. These areas range from shallow open water to seasonally flooded grasslands and forests.

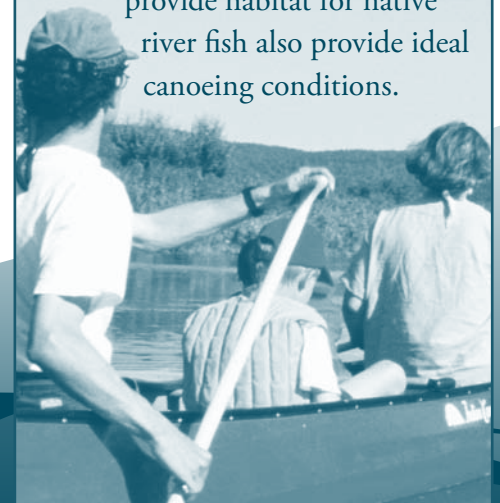
Riparian habitats. Areas adjacent to stream channels, reservoirs or wetlands that typically support woody vegetation adapted to life in dryer conditions than wetlands. Along most of the river, cottonwood forests are dominant.

Riverine habitat. Open water along the river, characterized by a range of flow and depths. The Missouri River includes areas of exposed and submerged sandbars, islands, side channels and backwaters.

Reservoirs. Bodies of water retained by a dam, typically more like a lake in nature with minimal flow and variable water levels.

HEALTHY RIVER, PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES

Species protection benefits not just fish and wildlife but also people and communities. An abundance of habitat and native wildlife provides numerous ecological services to society which includes: improving water quality and increasing recreation opportunities along the river, such as fishing, wildlife viewing and canoeing. For example, the same slow-moving river areas that provide habitat for native river fish also provide ideal canoeing conditions.



River Habitat . Continued from first page
The dynamic nature of the Missouri River means habitats are changing on a daily, seasonal, annual and long-term basis. Erosive forces are constantly transporting sediment down the river, creating and modifying habitat and removing terrestrial vegetation from some areas while creating suitable conditions for new plants to grow in other areas. Seasonal river flow patterns flood wetlands and maintain lakes that are important for wildlife to breed and find food. The combination of open water, wetland and riparian vegetation is particularly important for the large number of waterfowl that stop along the Missouri River during spring and fall migrations.

NATIVE SPECIES

Fish. Over 156 fish species have been documented in the Missouri River. These species include a variety of native species and numerous species that have been introduced into the six reservoirs and river. Native river fish include catfish, sturgeon, sauger, suckers, paddlefish, carp, river carpsucker, shorthead redhorse, freshwater drum, goldeye, shortnose gar, gizzard shad, flathead chub, blue sucker and several types of shiners. Introduced species include chinook salmon, brown trout, rainbow trout, lake trout, cisco and rainbow smelt.

Different species are found in the river and reservoir areas, as species are specially adapted to live in a certain kind of habitat. Most riverine fish depend on shallow, slow-moving water habitat for spawning or protecting their young. Many species spend their entire lifetime in these areas of the river.

“...healthy fish and wildlife, healthy habitats, healthy people and a healthy economy...”

- U.S. Fish & Wildlife

Birds. The river valley is also part of the internationally significant central flyway, hosting the migration of millions of waterbirds (i.e. white pelicans, geese, ducks, herons, egrets and shorebirds) and songbirds. The river valley also provides breeding habitat for numerous species including the least tern, piping plover and bald eagle.

PROTECTING WILDLIFE

Balancing the needs of people with those of nature is an ongoing challenge. Development of the Missouri River for other purposes has contributed to the loss of important habitat. Populations of native river fish, including catfish, sturgeon, sauger, suckers, and paddlefish, have declined as a result of blocked migration routes, change in or loss of habitat, and competition from new species that have taken advantage of changes in the river's ecosystem.

One species, the pallid sturgeon, has been listed as an endangered species since 1990. In addition, populations of paddlefish have declined over time, and currently paddlefish is a species of concern. Currently, the commercial harvest of catfish is not allowed in the Lower Missouri River due to concerns over declining numbers.

In addition, six species of birds, including the endangered least tern and the threatened piping plover, as well as two bat species occurring in the river valley are listed as either threatened or endangered.

The Corps' Missouri River Recovery Program, in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and many other agencies and organizations, is working to recover the populations of several threatened and endangered species, in particular the pallid sturgeon, least tern and piping plover. By building new habitat for all three species, raising young pallid sturgeon in hatcheries, and implementing a robust monitoring and evaluation program, the MRRP is restoring some of the river's natural form and function and creating an ecosystem in which native river species will thrive.

The mission of the Missouri River Recovery Program is to implement actions to accomplish Missouri River ecosystem recovery goals in coordination and collaboration with agency partners and stakeholders. The vision of the program is to create a sustainable ecosystem supporting thriving populations of native species while providing for current social and economic values.

For more information on the Missouri River Recovery Program, please visit www.moriverrecovery.org.

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