

League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region ILO

2023 Report to our local and state league members

LWV Upper Mississippi River Region, or UMRR (pronounced “Ummer”), is an interleague organization (ILO) focused on water quality. UMRR is made up of 60 local Leagues in the states of Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin representing over 7,000 local League members in this region. Our geographic area is the Upper Mississippi River basin – that part of the Upper Mississippi basin upstream of the river’s confluence with the Ohio at the south edge of Illinois to its headwaters in Itasca County, MN. Here’s a link <https://www.lwvumrr.org/blog/lwv-upper-mississippi-river-region-who-we-are-what-we-do> to learn more about what an ILO is and how it fits into the LWV national structure, and to learn more about how our structure strengthens our work, allowing the amplification of the voice of League throughout this watershed.

Established in 2015, UMRR’s ILO Board has strong representation from each of our four member states. **Our recently elected 2023-24 Board include:**

Officers & Directors

Position	Name	Home League
Chair	Mary Ellen Miller	LWV Des Moines (IA)
Vice-chair	Nancy Porter	LWV Johnson County (IA)
Past Chair	Mary and Steve Ploesser	LWV Dane County (WI)
Secretary	Tam Prenosil	LWV Dubuque (IA)
Treasurer	Catherine Franczyk	LWV Wheaton (IL)
Communications	Gretchen Sabel	LWV ABC (MN)
IA Representative	Sue Wilson	LWV Dubuque (IA)
IA Alternate	EJ Gallagher (pending)	LWV Blackhawk-Bremer (IA)
IL Representative	Lee Ekstrom	LWV McHenry County (IL)
IL Alternate	Paula Ekstrom	LWV McHenry County (IL)
MN Representative	Kay Slama	LWV Willmar (MN)
MN Alternate	Lonni McCauley	LWV ABC (MN)
WI Representative	Carolyn Mahlum-Jenkins	LWV La Crosse (WI)
WI Alternate	Nancy Hill	LWV La Crosse (WI)
OFF BOARD POSITIONS		
Nominating Committee	Bonnie Cox	LWV Jo Daviess County (IL)
Mississippi River Network Liaison	Nancy Porter	LWV Johnson County (IA)
Action Chair	Kay Slama	LWV Willmar (MN)

UMRR BOARD MEETINGS & ACTIVITIES: The Board meets six times a year on the first Monday of even numbered months via ZOOM. Agenda and Zoom link are posted on our website. Minutes of our UMRR May 22,2023, annual meeting is attached (the video recording of the meeting is now available on our website). Also attached is the 2022-23 UMRR Action

League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region ILO

Committee report. Our display exhibit was seen at the annual Iowa Water Conference, the LWV US biennial convention in Denver, CO, the LWV Lake Michigan ILO annual meeting as well as at our member state conventions.

UMRR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS: As part of each Board meeting, we hold an educational session that focuses on a specific topic of concern in the watershed. Our education sessions are aimed at educating league members on the issues within the UMRR watershed to learn what we can do on an individual, community, regional and national level to protect and improve water quality in the Mississippi River. These educational sessions **are free and open to the public** and recorded videos are shared and posted on our website. We encourage local Leagues to utilize these session recordings as part of their educational programming.

Educational sessions during 2022-23:

- **August 1: 2023 Farm Bill Water Quality Issues, Mississippi River Network**
- **October 3: CO2 Pipelines Threat to Upper Midwest Waters, IA Sierra Club**
- **December 5: Safeguarding our Mississippi River Together legislation**
- **February 6: Clean Water for All, a national coalition**
- **April 3: Driftless Region Ground Water/Aquifer Geology/Iowa's Bloody Run**
- **May 22: LWV US Climate Interest Group**

UMRR WEBSITE & NEWSLETTER: our [website www.lwvummr.org](http://www.lwvummr.org) has lots of information! Our Blog features 2-3 posts per month on current UMRR topics of interest. One recent post discusses the impact of the recent US Supreme Court decision in *Sackett vs EPA* which changes the definition of "navigable waters" as defined in the Clean Water Act. We also send out an email newsletter that includes links to our Blog posts and other items of interest. Sign up here <https://www.lwvumrr.org/contact-us.html>

FUTURE PLANS: As we begin our 8th year advocating for clean water and promoting the health of the Mississippi River, the UMRR board will be meeting in person (for the first time since Covid) for a June 11-12, 2023 retreat during which we will conduct a Board Orientation program and discuss our Program Plans for the coming year. Other items to consider include 2023 Farm Bill advocacy, board succession planning, future exhibit opportunities, the inclusion of Missouri Leagues on our board and our participation in the 2025 100th anniversary celebration of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge which stretches 261 miles from Wabasha, MN, to Rock Island, IL, and protects more than 240,000 acres of the Mississippi River floodplain.

The Mississippi River is an enduring and defining feature of North America. We invite all who are interested in the restoration and revitalization of this valuable natural resource to join us in this important work! All are welcome to attend our board meetings and our educational programs, no fee. As always, we very much appreciate the continued support of the local Leagues in our Upper Mississippi River Region. Our work is made possible by your dues and donations.

In League, Mary Ellen Miller, UMMR Chair, 2023-25

memiller.lwvumrr@gmail.com

League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region ILO

Action Committee report, 2022-23 Kay Slama, Chair

Operations:

- Organized more clearly to conform with by-laws specifying Robert's Rules as our guidance: Standing Committee, Board appoints members each year. This year it included all Board members plus Lynne Markus.
- Elected Kay Slama Action Committee Chair, Lonnie McCauley Vice-Chair, and Tamara Prenosil Secretary for the 2022-23 year.
- 5/21/22 annual UMRR meeting gave Action Committee clear permission to take action on a one-state issue between board meetings, with permission from that state's LWV.

Through the year, worked on:

- Farm Bill information and advocacy
- Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative (MRRRI) and Save our Mississippi River Together (SMRT) and Mississippi River compact advocacy (voted in March to sign onto MRRRI letter when Rep. McCollum reintroduces to get it a bill number, sent letter to LWV/US Climate Interest Group)
- A clear and expeditious process to get LWV-US approval for a national action by UMRR
- Investigation and possibilities to join LWV-US Climate Interest Group.
- Co-sponsored a Minnesota Climate Change Task Force informational program

Affiliations with other organizations:

- Decided not to join Clean Water for All, which required LWV-US approval, but rather work through our membership in its Mississippi River Network (MRN). Liaison is Porter, with Prenosil liaising to CWfA, Miller on its 2023 Farm Bill committee.
- 100 Grannies, Plastics: Porter, Sabel, Prenosil
- MN Environmental Partnership Water Cluster: Markus
- LWV-US Climate Interest Group: Mahlum-Jenkins, will be UMRR annual meeting presentation
- MN Sierra Club North Star chapter and CURE (Clean Up the River Environment): Slama
- Land Stewardship Project: McCauley
- Lake Michigan ILO: Lee and Paula Ekstrom, Mahlum-Jenkins, Franczyk
- IL Prairie Rivers Network: Franczyk

Tabled at:

- Member state conventions
- Iowa Water Conference
- LWV-US convention
- LWV Lake Michigan ILO
- As other opportunities occur

League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region ILO

Action Committee report, 2022-23 Kay Slama, Chair

Signed onto organizational letters about the following issues:

- UM Forever Green initiative (signed 2/3 letter to MN legislature)
- Kernza and other continuous living cover crops (signed 2/3 letter to MN legislature)
- Natural Resources Trust Fund (signed 2/6 letter to MN legislators)
- PFAS (signed 2/10 letter to MN legislature)
- MPCA community board (signed letter 2/24 to MN legislature)
- Clean Transportation Standard (signed 3/2 letter to MN legislators)
- Lowland conifer carbon reserve in MN (sent letter 3/22 to MN Legislators)
- Carbon dioxide pipelines (signed letter to MN PUC and 3/28 letter to Army Corps of Engineers about federal permit)
- Environment, Natural Resources, Climate, and Energy Finance and Policy Bill (signed 4/16 letter to MN legislators)
- Lead in water (signed 4/17 letter ~HR 24 to MN legislators)

Members from each state reported on issues in their respective states involving the above topics and others, including:

- Fossil fuel pipelines
- Inflation Reduction Act opportunities
- Neonicotinoids, including letter to MN governor, DNR, and lawmakers
- Agricultural herbicides
- Clean energy state law
- Foreign ownership of farm land
- Commercial/farm water withdrawal from wells and water bodies
- MN Lock & Dam #1
- Solar energy
- Boats making large wakes for recreational purposes
- Public water inventory in MN
- Polluted city and well water along the Mississippi
- Sustainable agriculture and wetlands

League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region ILO

EIGHTH ANNUAL MEETING

OF

THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGION

INTER LEAGUE ORGANIZATION

May 22, 2023, Virtual Meeting via Zoom

The eighth annual meeting of the Upper Mississippi River Region Inter-League Organization (UMRR-ILO) was called to order at 6:00 p.m. via Zoom this year by chair Mary Ellen Miller (IA Metro Des Moines). In attendance and eligible to vote were 11 Board members, 31 delegates from local chapters. There were 13 additional attendees.

OPEN MEETING, SOCIAL TIME (5:30 p.m.)

Gretchen Sabel (MN ABC) shared the Quizzes on her League's website that are used as ice breakers while attendees at zoom meetings were checking in. She invited the UMRR-ILO participants to use them if they wished.

QUALIFICATIONS OF DELEGATES

Gretchen Sabel reported a quorum was present after she admitted all participants into the Zoom meeting.

BUSINESS MEETING

INTRODUCTION OF BOARD MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Each Board member present gave a brief summary about their home League and past involvement with the UMRR-ILO. Absent Board members were mentioned by Chair Mary Ellen Miller.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Minutes of the Seventh Annual Meeting held on May 21, 2022, via Zoom were included in program materials which were on the UMRR-ILO website prior to this meeting. Carolyn Mahlum-Jenkins (WI La Crosse) moved, and Lee Ekstrom (IL McHenry CO) seconded that the minutes be approved. Motion Carried.

TREASURER'S REPORT AND ADOPTION OF ANNUAL BUDGET

The treasurer's report was submitted by Catherine Franczyk (IL Wheaton) and was included in the program materials which were on the UMRR-ILO website prior to this meeting. The UMRR-ILO fiscal year is from July 1 through June 30. As of 3-31-2023 there was \$7,192.94 in our checking account and \$5,334.88 in our savings account for a total of \$12,527.82. This total includes \$100 remaining from the Judy Beck Memorial Fund and \$166.82 remaining from a grant from the Environmental Resource Council. (The ERC grant is administered by Lonnie McCauley, UMRR-ILO Board member).

League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region ILO

At the time the written report was posted on the website, the UMRR-ILO had 59 members. Since that time the number is now 64. In addition to the dues that local and state leagues pay each year, \$1,538.11 was donated to the UMRR-ILO.

Catherine Franczyk reported continued growth in our finances. Meeting by Zoom saves money, but plans are to include some in-person meetings now that the numbers for the COVID pandemic are decreasing. We also plan to purchase stand-up banners and display materials for each state to use at conferences and League functions to promote the work of the UMRR-ILO. We anticipate some additional fees for educational events.

Catherine Franczyk moved Lynn Theurer seconded that the treasurer's report be filed for audit. Motion carried.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT

The nominating committee report was submitted by Bonnie Cox (IL Jo Davies CO) and Tamara Prenosil (IA Dubuque) and was included in the program materials which were on the UMRR-ILO website prior to this meeting.

For 2023-25, the following candidates will stand for election:

- Chair: Mary Ellen Miller (IA Metro Des Moines)
- Vice Chair: Nancy Porter (IA Iowa City)
- Treasurer: Catherine Franczyk (IL Wheaton)
- Director of Communications: Gretchen Sabel (MN ABC)

Chair of the Nominating Committee: (non-Board member – one year position) Bonnie Cox has agreed to be chair of the Nominating Committee again for 2024 as she was in 2023.

No nominations were put forth from the meeting participants. All candidates were elected.

ACTION COMMITTEE REPORT AND PROGRAM FOR ACTION

The Action Committee report was submitted by Kay Slama (MN Willmar), Chair of the Action Committee, and was included in the program materials which were on the UMRR-ILO website prior to this meeting. Kay Slama reported that the procedure adopted at the last UMRR-ILO annual meeting was very helpful in allowing the board and action committee to address advocacy issues in a timely manner.

If action is needed before a regularly scheduled Board or Action Committee meeting on an issue involving only one state, the Board authorizes the Chair of the Action Committee to send the motion by email to all Action Committee members. On approval by a majority of a quorum of the Action Committee, the Action Committee may take action on behalf of UMRR. The Action Committee's quorum shall be the number of members voting on an issue within the deadline set by email and text notification of all Action Committee members. Action Committee members of the relevant state may need to consult their state LWV board for approval of their vote.

The Action Committee report included the following areas:

League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region ILO

- Operations
- Issues that were worked on during the year
- Affiliations with other organizations
- Events at which the UMRR-ILO tabled
- Issues that the UMRR-ILO signed onto in organizational letters
- Issues reported on by members impacting their states

LWV UMRR PROGRAM FOR ACTION 2023-24

The UMRR-ILO will once again follow the Program for Action that was adopted at the 2022 UMRR-ILO Annual Meeting.

LWV UMRR Program for Action 2022-23

LWV UMRR is uniquely positioned - we are a multi-state League focused on protecting and enhancing the Mississippi River. The people in our League are active, engaged, and passionate, and are also involved in other organizations, giving us a broad base of knowledge about what's happening around us.

Now it's time to take advantage of our unique position to lead our Leagues in advocating for the Mississippi as big federal bills like the Farm Bill, MRRRI and SMRT boil through Congress. This draft program for action takes the work we've done together and points us toward our work for the future.

To do this, LWV UMRR proposes to:

Build upon the affiliations LWV UMRR members have in other LWV's and other organizations focused on the Mississippi to seek opportunities to advocate for the river in a broad, national context.

Lead LWV in supporting federal legislation to protect the Mississippi River's quality and quantity:

- Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative – introduced, but stalled
- Safeguarding our Mississippi River Together – introduced, but stalled · 2023 Farm Bill (reauthorized every five years)

Work with our member state Leagues and LWV US to build effective advocacy based on LWV positions, and partner with organizations actively working on these bills.

Research and assess the possibility of an Upper Midwest Compact to protect the Mississippi from water diversion.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER NETWORK (MRN)

The Mississippi River Network report was submitted by Nancy Porter (IA Iowa City) and was included in the program materials which were on the UMRR-ILO website prior to this meeting. The MRN is a coalition of 58 organizations from the Headwaters to the Gulf of Mexico. It has our central tenets – People, Land, Water, Wildlife. States along the Mississippi can participate in River Days of Action. In 2022 people visited the National Mississippi River Museum with a UNITED presentation from the Curator of Conservation Programs. There is a 2023 event planned to coincide with the LWVIA State Convention in Dubuque, Iowa, and Galena, Illinois. The group continues to advocate for the Mississippi

League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region ILO

River Restoration and Resilience Initiative (MRRRI) as Junewell as increased laws and funding for conservation in the Farm Bill which is reauthorized every five years and 2023 it will be voted upon.

OTHER/ANNOUNCEMENTS

The UMRR-ILO Board will hold an in-person retreat in La Crosse, Wisconsin on Sunday and Monday June 12 & 13. We plan to discuss a new Board member orientation process, a succession strategy, as well as plan actions for 2023-2024. LWVIA needs to appoint an alternate to the UMRR-ILO Board.

Meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Submitted by Tamara Prenosil

PUBLIC EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATION AT 7:00 P.M.

United We Stand Stronger

Jessica Rolhoff, Midwest Regional Organizer for LWV US. Jessica will give an update (and answer questions) about the LWV US transformation plan, introducing this new LWV US initiative (regional reps) to our members.

Elizabeth "Joy" Guscott-Mueller serves as President of the LWV Lake Michigan Region, a four state, fifty-nine chapter, Inter League Organization, with a mission to protect and enhance Lake Michigan and its associated watershed. She will inform us about the LWV US Climate Interest Group. She chairs its Water Team.