

November 1, 2024

Dear Honorable Local Leader and Tribal leader,

The Mississippi River Local and Tribal Leaders Agreement is a landmark initiative led by cities and communities along the Mississippi River to promote the sustainable use, protection, and restoration of this vital waterway. The Mississippi River's economic, ecological, and social importance to millions of Americans demands coordinated action at the local, state, regional and national level to safeguard its future.

Representing frontline communities experiencing the first and worst threats posed by pollution, climate change, and unsustainable water use, local leaders and Tribal leaders of communities across the basin are uniting to make a commitment to take meaningful steps toward the preservation and management of water resources. This generational commitment is reflected in the Mississippi River Local and Tribal Leaders Agreement.

This Agreement addresses the many threats currently facing the Mississippi River and sets forth goals and commitments for reducing pollution, restoring natural habitats, improving water quality, mitigating flooding risks, and promoting sustainable water practices within each local leader's and Tribal leader's jurisdiction. By leading through local and Tribal action, local and Tribal leaders aim to create a sustainable future for the Mississippi River and the millions of people and ecosystems that depend on it.

While those who live directly on the river—the local leaders and Tribal leaders of communities that directly border the Mississippi River—have a unique connection to the river reflected in this agreement, local leaders and Tribal leaders of communities located within the corridor states and the broader Mississippi River watershed are also invited to sign this agreement, given their close connection to the river. All those who rely on the river are driving a locally-focused movement that will protect the Mississippi River for your children and beyond, preserving the histories, cultures, and communities of our ancestors and descendants. Working together we can transform the future of the Mississippi River. Join us.

Hon. Buz Craft  
Mayor of Vidalia, Louisiana  
MRCTI City/State Task Force Co-Chair

Colin Wellenkamp  
Executive Director  
Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI)

Alexandra Campbell-Ferrari  
Executive Director  
Center for Water Security and Cooperation (CWSC)

## **Mississippi River Local and Tribal Leaders Agreement**

*Whereas*, the Mississippi River is central to the histories, cultures, economies, and communities of the ten states that directly border it and to countless others around the country,

*Whereas*, the Mississippi River is central to survival of these communities and the people who live in them,

*Whereas*, the Mississippi River is a critical engine of commerce and navigation, as it has been for generations,

*Whereas*, the Mississippi River is experiencing more frequent and more dangerous floods which is causing loss of life, property damage, and economic hardship,

*Whereas*, the Mississippi River is also experiencing more frequent periods of drought,

*Whereas*, the Mississippi River is the main source of drinking water for almost 20 million people and 50 municipalities,

*Whereas*, the Mississippi River is a critical vein for commerce and enables the transport of 669 million tons of cargo annually,

*Whereas*, low water levels impedes navigation and can delay or prevent the movement of goods,

*Whereas*, the water quality of the Mississippi River is impacted by high levels of pollution from agricultural runoff, industrial discharges, and urban wastewater, leading to environmental, public health, and economic concerns,

*Whereas*, there is a dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico as a result of the nitrogen and phosphorus transported by the River,

*Whereas*, droughts and unsustainable use are leading to saltwater intrusion and threatening drinking water supplies,

*Whereas*, droughts, floods, hurricanes and other natural disasters, along with saltwater intrusion, pollution and other anthropogenic impacts can have a disparate impact on lower-income, elderly, disabled and other vulnerable members of our communities,

*Whereas*, there is no shared agreement—such as an interstate water compact—for managing and protecting the Mississippi River,

We, the undersigned local leaders and Tribal leaders of cities along the Mississippi River and its tributaries, agree to the following:

## **Our Goals and Commitments**

We recognize the critical importance of the Mississippi River as a source of drinking water, commerce, navigation, recreation, and ecological diversity.

We commit to taking local action to protect, restore, and sustainably manage the water resources of the Mississippi River Basin. The health of the river directly impacts the well-being of our cities, residents, and future generations.

In order to fully address the complex issues facing the Mississippi River, we pledge to lead by example, committing our cities to practices that safeguard our vital waterway, reduce pollution, enable our local economies to thrive, ensure our populations are healthy, and enable the sustainability of the river's ecosystems.

We urge the federal government and state governments to enact laws, policies, and programs to manage and protect the Mississippi River so as to achieve water security, improve water quality, secure drinking water supplies, and protect economic and public health.

We urge the U.S. Congress to pass bipartisan legislation that empowers and commands the states that border the Mississippi River to adopt a binding river-wide agreement, including an interstate water compact.

To implement our vision for the River, we will strive to protect and manage the water resources of the Mississippi River by taking actions in our own operations and communities, such as:

### **1. Reduce pollution entering the Mississippi River and improve water quality.**

- Adopt and enforce land-use and zoning laws and policies to manage, restrict and prohibit activities within buffer zones, floodplains, and critical watersheds that would pollute water resources, including the adoption of best management practices.
- Adopt and implement policies and strategies to reduce urban runoff, including the use of green infrastructure, permeable surfaces, and enhanced stormwater management systems.
- Support initiatives by agricultural, industrial, and other stakeholders to design and implement approaches for limiting the release of fertilizers, pesticides, and other pollutants into the river system.
- Improve wastewater treatment processes and compliance with the Clean Water Act to minimize nutrient pollution, including nitrogen and phosphorus, which contribute to algal blooms and water quality degradation.
- Develop programs to map the location and physical state of household septic systems and to replace failed systems, to prevent the spread of human waste.
- Conduct water quality testing within your community, track and report changes over time, and identify the sources of water quality degradation.
- Require all city planning and projects to consider impacts on the quality and quantity of the Mississippi River and to minimize or eliminate those impacts.

- Use our offices to convene stakeholders who can work together to reduce the creation and discharge of pollutants into our river, including those developing new and innovative technologies.
- Encourage the recycling of or end of single-use plastics.
- Encourage the proper disposal of unused pharmaceuticals, including through the use of city collection points.

## **2. Promote sustainable, efficient, and equitable water use and improve conservation.**

- Identify, recognize, and protect Tribal and cultural uses of the River.
- Facilitate residential use of rainwater capture for outdoor uses.
- Promote water conservation programs for residential, commercial, and industrial users, including incentives for adopting water-saving technologies.
- Retrofit plumbing with water-efficient models in local government-owned buildings to improve conservation.
- Adopt an asset management plan for local government infrastructure to ensure efficient, high-performing water and wastewater utilities.
- Implement smart metering and water monitoring systems in local government-owned buildings to track water use and identify opportunities for conservation.
- Adopt and enforce land-use policies that require new development projects to conduct assessments of local water availability before starting, to include water efficient fixtures and greywater reuse systems, and to incorporate water conservation and pollution reduction measures as part of their plans in order to minimize their impact on the river.
- Increase protections that ensure that no person is left without access to basic water and sanitation services, particularly in the face of disasters, including through the development of programs and plans that will protect these persons and create an equitable community that leaves no person behind.

## **3. Restore ecosystems and natural habitats in the Mississippi River.**

- Adopt and implement policies to restore wetlands, floodplains, and riparian buffers along the river, which help to filter pollutants, manage flooding, and provide habitat for wildlife.
- Work with state and federal agencies to remove invasive species and protect native species that are essential to the ecological balance of the river system.
- Implement habitat restoration programs that focus on rehabilitating degraded areas along the river's banks, ensuring they can continue to support diverse aquatic and terrestrial species.

## **4. Reduce flooding risks and enhance climate resilience.**

- Adopt and implement local flood management policies and strategies that integrate natural defenses to flooding, such as restoring wetlands, maintaining natural floodplains, and restoring forests, to complement traditional flood control infrastructure.

- Adopt and enforce land-use laws and policies that reduce new construction in flood prone zones, especially the most severe flood prone zones, and preserve open green space.
- Collaborate on regional initiatives to manage water levels and flood risks across jurisdictions, recognizing that river management requires coordinated action.
- Develop city climate resilience plans that address water-related challenges such as increased frequency and severity of flooding and droughts as well as shifting weather patterns to prepare cities for climate change impacts.

#### **5. Engage the public in the protection of the Mississippi River and foster education.**

- Preserve and expand public spaces and greenways along the Mississippi River.
- Build connections between your community and the cultures, history, and environment of the Mississippi River, including through festivals, concerts, and other events and outings near and on the Mississippi River.
- Educate residents on the importance of protecting the river and how they conserve water and reduce the introduction of pollution to the River.
- Support volunteer programs that encourage local residents to learn about and experience the Mississippi River.
- Launch citizen science initiatives that monitor the health of the river.
- Collaborate with schools, universities, and research institutions to promote water conservation education and foster a culture of water and environmental stewardship in future generations.
- Sponsor grade school competitions for science and policy solutions to protect and manage the Mississippi River.
- Collect and publish data and information about the Mississippi River to create closer connections between communities and the River.

#### **6. Collaborate with those in our communities and with other communities.**

- Work with neighboring cities, state governments, Native American tribes, industry leaders, agricultural producers, environmental groups, community groups, and residents to co-develop, and co-implement any policies, strategies, programs, and plans designed to address the challenges identified above.
- Work with any community that relies on the Mississippi River to co-create and implement policies, strategies, programs, and plans.
- Engage with federal agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to shape and strengthen regional and national initiatives.

#### **7. Track and report progress toward these goals.**

- Establish metrics to track progress in identifying and implementing the initiatives selected and their impact in improving water quality, reducing flood risks, and restoring the Mississippi River.

- Share data and information on progress with residents, other cities, and key stakeholders.
- Participate in national and regional convenings and efforts to bring visibility to the challenges in the Mississippi River and the solutions and collaborations being developed and implemented by local leaders at the local and regional levels.

## **Implementation and Monitoring**

We commit to the following processes and procedures that will allow us to track and share our progress in achieving the above Goals and Commitments:

Signatories signing the Agreement will submit an Implementation Plan based on the Implementation Plan Form included as Appendix One to this Agreement. Signatories to the Agreement shall be invited to submit to the Secretariat their Implementation Plan beginning on the day that they sign the Agreement. The initial Implementation Plan shall be submitted within the first 120 days after the Agreement is signed. Implementation Plans can be updated as necessary, but shall be updated no less frequently than once every three years.

Signatories shall submit to the Secretariat an annual progress report. The Secretariat will develop the form and procedure for the submission and public dissemination of these forms. The annual progress report will include information on progress made to implement and achieve the commitments.

Signatories will participate in periodic meetings to discuss implementation and other topics related to the Agreement and improving collaboration and cooperation on the Mississippi River. These meetings will be organized by the Secretariat.

If an Implementation Plan is not submitted within the first 120 days of signing, if an annual progress report is not submitted, or if any future Implementation Plans as required under this agreement are not submitted, the Secretariat will make reasonable efforts to contact and encourage the submission of these documents. At the Secretariat's discretion, a City, Town or Tribe that has not submitted one of these required documents listed above or made a reasonable effort to submit a required document may be deemed to no longer be a member of this Agreement, and will no longer be able to list itself as an active member of this agreement.

## **Secretariat and Partner Organizations**

In order to facilitate our efforts under this Agreement, we create the following Secretariat and invite partner organizations to help advance this Agreement:

The Center for Water Security and Cooperation will serve as the Secretariat for the Agreement. The role of the Secretariat will include, but is not limited to, defining the structure of the Secretariat, educating potential signatories, educating communities on the impact and purpose of the agreement and work completed under the agreement, recruiting additional signatories, monitoring and reporting implementation of the Agreement including developing reporting forms

and tools, issuing periodic progress reports and updates to signatories and the public, organizing meetings with and between signatories and stakeholders, seeking financial resources to fund the work of the Secretariat and the signatories, and identifying additional opportunities to build collaboration and cooperation on the Mississippi River, particularly the creation of an Interstate Compact or the development of other regional legal arrangements.

The primary signatories to the Agreement are On-River Partners, Corridor Partners, and Watershed Partners. On-River Partners are Mayors, Tribal leaders, and equivalent local leaders of communities located directly on the Mississippi River. Corridor Partners are Mayors, Tribal leaders, and equivalent local leaders of communities located in the ten states that form the corridor of the Mississippi River. Watershed Partners are Mayors, Tribal leaders, and equivalent local leaders of communities located within the broader Mississippi River watershed. As Founding Partner organizations, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI) and Center for Water Security and Cooperation are primary signatories to the Agreement.

Other types of individuals, organizations, and for-profit entities may be invited by the Secretariat and by On-River, Corridor, Watershed, and Founding Partner organizations with approval by the Secretariat to become contributing or other type of partners.

The Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative and the Center for Water Security and Cooperation are Founding Partner organizations. Other individuals, organizations, and for-profit entities may be invited by the Secretariat to become implementation partners as designated by the Secretariat.

## **Conclusion**

As local leaders and Tribal leaders of communities along the Mississippi River and leaders within the Mississippi River watershed, we acknowledge our responsibility to protect this shared resource for future generations. By taking local action, engaging our communities, and working collaboratively, we aim to ensure that the Mississippi River remains a vital, healthy, and sustainable waterway for centuries to come.

**Signed on this [Date], by the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI), the Center for Water Security and Cooperation, local leaders and Tribal leaders of the Mississippi River Basin Cities, and local leaders and Tribal leaders of communities within the Mississippi River watershed:**

[Signatures of Local and Tribal Leaders]

## Signature Page

By signing I express my support for the Mississippi River Local and Tribal Leaders Agreement.

Date:

Local or Tribal Leader Name:

Signature:

Address:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

Local or Tribal Leader Email:

If you are designated a Staff person to be the designated contact point, please include their information below.

Staff Contact Name:

Staff Contact Title:

Staff Phone:

Staff Email:

Any additional comments or statements in support of the Agreement to be used on the website, in press releases, etc. (*optional*):

Please return completed form at your earliest convenience to:  
Center for Water Security and Cooperation

### **By Mail:**

The Center for Water Security and Cooperation  
1701 Pennsylvania Ave. NW Ste. 200  
Washington, D.C. 20006

### **By Email:**

[cwsc@ourwatersecurity.org](mailto:cwsc@ourwatersecurity.org)



## Appendix One

The purpose of the Implementation Plan is to create a simple way for local and Tribal leaders to identify their specific commitments for implementing the Mississippi River Local and Tribal Leaders Agreement. This will create a way by which to increase visibility of efforts to better protect and manage the Mississippi River and to track progress in implementing the Agreement over time.

Signatories to the Mississippi River Local and Tribal Leaders Agreement should plan to submit an Implementation Plan as early as the day they sign the Agreement and up to 120 days after signing the Agreement.

### Implementation Plan Form

Local or Tribal Leader Name:

Community Name:

Local or Tribal Leader Address:

Local or Tribal Leader Email:

Date Plan Submitted:

Contact Point:

Contact Point Title:

Contact Point Email:

Contact Point Phone Number:

### Question #1

What studies, activities, actions will the local or Tribal leader take to implement the Agreement? Please identify at least three to five commitments.

Directions: Identify the actions and/or activities that the local or Tribal leader will take to implement the Agreement and the time period. Please explain the action and/or activity, including describing the purpose, the intended benefits and outcomes, and how the proposed actions and/or activities work to achieve the goals of the Agreement.

1. Action or activity, time period:

Explanation:

2. Action or activity, time period:

Explanation:

3. Action or activity, time period:

Explanation

4. Action or activity, time period:

Explanation:

5. Action or activity, time period:

Explanation:

**Question #2**

How will the benefit(s), impact(s), and outcome(s) of the actions and/or activities be measured?

Directions: Identify how the benefits, impacts, and outcomes of the proposed action/activity will be measured.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.