

Senator Rounds Opening Statement at Subcommittee Hearing on Missouri River Management March 31, 2016

The Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on Superfund, Waste Management, and Regulatory Oversight is meeting today to conduct a field hearing entitled “Five Years from the Flood: Oversight of the Army Corps’ Management of the Missouri River and Suggestions for Improvement”. I would like to thank our witnesses for being with us today and I look forward to hearing your testimony.

The United States Army Corps of Engineers is responsible for managing the Missouri River to meet the needs of both the Corps and the surrounding communities. In order for this to be successful, management of the river should always be done with extensive communication among stakeholders and a well-founded understanding of the needs of state and local governments, agriculture, recreation and economic interests – all of which depend on proper management of the Missouri River.

In 2011, record-setting rains, unusually moist soil conditions, and melting snow from a near-record setting snowfall in the Rocky Mountains and Northern Plains states combined to form a perfect storm that led to catastrophic flooding all along the Missouri River basin.

From May through August, extensive flooding caused major damage on residences, infrastructure, businesses and agriculture in the basin states of South Dakota, North Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, and Montana and Kansas.

The flood caused more than \$2 billion dollars in damages and resulted in 5 fatalities. 4,000 homes were flooded. Roads were destroyed, and agricultural land was ruined. Entire communities were under attack from the 2011 flood, largely left to fend for themselves. The Federal Emergency Management Administration, or FEMA, issued disaster declarations in each state in this region.

In our state capital of Pierre and neighboring Fort Pierre, residents were given less than one week to prepare for what would be one of the worst floods in 60 years. After the flood, the city’s streets, sewage system, storm sewers, parks and electrical systems suffered unprecedented damage that cost millions of dollars to repair. The recovery took months. Citizens are still paying for the damages.

When the flood waters had receded and life began to return to normal the next step was to make sure that any and all measures were taken to make certain this never happens again.

A 2014 Government Accountability Office report concluded that improving existing hydrologic data and collecting new soil moisture, plains snowpack, and archeological flood and drought data could assist the Corps in making future release decision and in improving long-term

forecasting models. Accordingly, a 2014 Water Resources Reform bill, commonly known as WRRDA, authorized the Army Corps to coordinate with various government agencies to create a soil moisture and snowpack monitoring network in the Upper Missouri River Basin.

Since the flood, we have also been confronted with several other issues involving the Army Corps' management of the Missouri River. In 2008, the Army Corps issued Real Estate Guidance Policy Letter Number 26. This directive required municipal and industrial water users from the Missouri River Mainstem Reservoirs to acquire a water storage contract from the Corps before the Corps would issue an access easement for a pump site. Since the issuance of this guidance policy, the Corps has been seemingly unable or unwilling to issue access easements to South Dakotans seeking to utilize water from the Missouri.

Additionally, the Corps has been undertaking surplus water studies and engaging in a rulemaking effort to standardize how the Corps will charge citizens for surplus water storage. The 2014 WRRDA bill prohibited the Corps from charging a fee for surplus water for ten years. This prohibition should be permanent – South Dakotans should not be required to pay a fee of any kind for using water from the Missouri River.

Proper management of the Missouri River is vital to life in the Midwest. We depend on the Missouri River not only for recreation, but for agriculture and irrigation, shipping and hydroelectric power. The Missouri River is vital to our livelihood and our economy.

It has now been nearly five years since the flood. Today we will be hearing testimony from both the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and state and local stakeholders regarding the Corps' management of the Missouri River. We will be exploring what the Corps is doing right, what can be improved upon and how Congress can help get the Corps and the communities the resources they need to manage this vital resource. We will also offer suggestions on how the Corps' management can be improved in order to prevent future flooding and better meet the needs of both the surrounding communities and the Corps.

Each witness will have five minutes to present their testimony and I will then follow-up with questions to the witnesses.

I'd like to again thank our witnesses for being with us today and I look forward to hearing your testimony.