

**TESTIMONY OF BLAKE HURST BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
OVERSIGHT HEARING ON THE U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS'
MANAGEMENT OF THE 2019 MISSOURI RIVER BASIN FLOODING ON APRIL 17,
2019 AT KAUFMAN HALL IN GLENWOOD, IOWA**

Good Morning. My thanks to each of you for participating in today's field hearing. It's extremely helpful that you're here to listen to those affected by this year's flooding and see the damage firsthand.

My name is Blake Hurst and I am a family farmer from Tarkio, Missouri which is about an hour southeast of here. My family raises row crops and operates a commercial greenhouse operation. Our farm has not been flooded but our county has an estimated 70,000 acres under water. I'm here as a member of the Coalition to Protect the Missouri River and President of Missouri Farm Bureau.

Over the past several weeks, we have watched our friends and neighbors in Iowa, Missouri, Kansas and Nebraska suffer from the impacts of historic Missouri River flooding. We've experienced severe winter weather, including the infamous "bomb cyclone" pattern, leaving behind record river stages, a dam failure, and scores of levee breaches. To make matters worse, there was little warning for residents to move personal property, equipment and stored crops.

We estimate that 187,000 acres have been flooded in four counties in northwest Missouri. As you know, this is extremely productive farmland with yields normally far above the state average. Most, if not all, of these acres will not be planted this growing season and we estimate the value of lost production of corn and soybeans alone at slightly over \$100 million, not including crops that were stored in bins and lost to the flood waters.

Much has been said about this event, including criticism directed toward the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). While there will be plenty of time to analyze if anything could've been done better, we're thankful for the Corps' efforts on several fronts, including positioning flood control gates at Gavins Point Dam to allow it to hold over two feet of extra water at Lewis and Clark Lake, and stopping releases from reservoirs in Kansas, the Osage River and Fort Randall Dam. These extraordinary measures undoubtedly prevented further damage.

While some are angry at the Corps, a more comprehensive review of the root causes must be considered. For example, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service), which dictates much of the Corps' actions, did require the implementation of artificial spring rises, construction of shallow water habitat chutes and notching of rock dikes that control the river's channel. While we support science-based species recovery efforts, any planned habitat construction projects that increase flood risk should be discontinued immediately.

Going forward, government agencies and stakeholders should engage in renewed discussion on how to enhance flood control throughout the system. While virtually all the discussion has centered on the mainstem Missouri River regulated by dams, it's worth noting this event primarily originated in the "unregulated" portion of the basin, which produces just less than half of the average runoff into the Missouri River. Any discussion that ignores this important fact misses the mark.

It's time to redouble our efforts on providing lower Missouri River residents with an improved flood control system that can better withstand events of the magnitude we're seeing in 2019. Flood control and protection of human life and property must be paramount in any decisions regarding Missouri River management. We call on you and your colleagues to authorize flood control as the primary purpose of Missouri River management.

Serious consideration must be given to increased upstream flood control storage, whether that be in the mainstem dams or on tributary projects. Any proposed change in flood control storage must also keep an eye toward times of drought, which the Missouri River system is just as prone to.

In addition, policy makers should take into account navigation, which is the other congressionally directed primary purpose of the system, as well as water supply needs for drinking water and utilities that we often take for granted, but have an enormous impact in our everyday lives.

We are encouraged by the recent meeting between the governors of Iowa, Missouri, and Nebraska and Corps leadership, focusing on solutions to protect against future floods. The governors stated they want to become more active in Missouri River management, and it's high time they have a prominent seat at the table. Serious discussion must include federal, state and local input.

While large floods often create huge amounts of destruction and personal suffering, they also create the chance to be more resilient to future floods. For the benefit of regional economic development and opportunities for future generations, we cannot delay these crucial conversations.

When flood recovery is complete, we will have failed if every structure is the same as it was, and if the management of the river has not changed. To do the same things and expect better results is the triumph of hope over experience. We should not, no we must not, settle for the pre flood status quo!

We at the Coalition to Protect the Missouri River and Missouri Farm Bureau look forward to these continued conversations and stand ready to assist you and your colleagues in crafting solutions.

Thank you.