# SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS ON THE FUTURE OF COLLABORATIVE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE MISSOURI RIVER BASIN

## Background

During July 20-25, 2003, participants in a training workshop held in South Sioux City, Nebraska focused on the potential for collaborative processes to improve the effectiveness of resource management in the Missouri River Basin. Funded by the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers, the course involved 34 participants from a broad range of government agencies, including seven federal agencies, nine tribes or tribal associations (including Mni Sose), and six states (including members of the Missouri River Basin Association and the Missouri River Natural Resources Commission.) The course included three case studies where multi-party collaboration has been used to improve resource management: the Nisqually River Council in Puget Sound, the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program, and the Glen Canyon Adaptive Management Program in the Grand Canyon. It included other exercises and activities designed to explore the challenges of designing and managing collaborative processes. Faculty and staff from the University of Michigan's Ecosystem Management Initiative facilitated the course, assisted by dispute resolution experts and resource management practitioners.

On the last day of the course, participants engaged in a visioning exercise and discussion of "next steps" for the Basin. What was remarkable from this conversation was the level of agreement about perceptions of the situation facing decision makers in the Basin and an overall vision of the River and its desirable future management process.

Note that the course was not a policy dialogue designed to include representation from all affected groups. Nongovernmental groups were not present and their perspectives are not included in the following. Nevertheless, the participants included a broad range of federal, tribal and state agency officials. The fact that their perspectives demonstrated a significant amount of commonality suggests that there may be common ground on which to build a more effective process for managing natural resources in the Basin.

The following pages outline these perspectives. Participants' vision for the future of the river and its management can be summarized as:

*A healthy Missouri River ecosystem providing a foundation for healthy people and economies. Both can be achieved through a collaborative, system-wide restoration and management process that involves the full range of interests and agencies in creative and adaptive problem-solving. It should be well informed by science and law, and not unduly dictated by the courts or political forces.*

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## Shared Perspectives of Federal, Tribal and State Agency Participants

1. **Change is needed. The current decision making system for managing the river and its ecosystem is not working effectively or efficiently.**

   - Interdependence. Participants viewed the many interests in the Basin as essentially interdependent, not able to achieve their own ends without affecting and being affected by others. Given the political and legal tools available to all sides, decision making is increasingly bound up in stalemate. Finding solutions that bridge these interests yet is true to the science and range of interests is needed.

   - Control by Federal courts. The state of impasse between affected interests is well illustrated by the current Federal court drama over river management, as well as the longstanding delays in revising the Master Manual. Groups in the region can either accept a situation where courts dictate decisions or can find ways to take control and develop ownership of the decision making process within the Basin.

   - Unbalanced participation and power. A number of workshop participants noted that the level of involvement of affected groups and agencies is not always equitable or effective. Some groups, notably the tribes, feel that they continue to be shut out of key processes.

   - Restoration and management science. There was a strong sense that the science underlying river management has come a long way, generating a scientific consensus on the need for connectivity between the river and its broader landscape ecosystem. It is not clear that the current management framework adequately reflects current scientific understanding and possibilities.

   - A decades-old legal and political framework. A number of participants felt that the current plans and laws underlying river management were framed in a very different time in the history of the Basin and America. This means that guiding principles underlying Pick/Sloan and the 1944 Flood Control Act need to be updated to reflect today's demands and possibilities. As one participant suggested, "We need to look at the Missouri River through our 2003 mindset."

2. **A shared vision of a desirable future might not be that difficult to achieve. The diverse participants in the workshop shared a vision of a healthy river and ecosystem that provides the foundation for healthy people, cultures and economies.** Elements of this vision included activities that:

   - Increase populations of native species; decrease exotics. The system needs to support a full suite of native species, find ways to restore endangered species and undertake significant efforts to reduce the spread of exotics such as the Asian carp and salt cedar.

   - Restore natural processes. Almost all participants highlighted the need to develop flow regimes and hydrologic processes that are more natural and more like the situation in the pre-dam river, including more connection of the river and its

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floodplain in at least some areas, less rock on the banks, improved water quality, more use of nonstructural flood control techniques, and in places, remediation of channelization.

- Develop a broader appreciation of the river. This broader view would include seeing the river as something more than a channel, including an appreciation of its ecosystem, spiritual, cultural and symbolic values
- Ensure balance among human uses. Participants described the need to achieve a balance between human interests and uses in a way that sustains healthy economies while restoring the river. Many hoped that this balance would include broader use of the river for boating and other recreation, along with expanded commercial and sport fishing. Others acknowledged the importance of the system at mitigating downstream flood damage, but wondered whether flood control could be achieved in ways that promote rather than restrict natural processes. There was a sense that some groups would get less from the river than they have historically, but that the aggregate gains would far outweigh any losses. Strategies such as compensation and land acquisition may be necessary to achieve this balance.
- Value and protect cultural resources. Some participants highlighted the need to better recognize and protect cultural resources in the Basin, many of which have a close association with the natural resources in the river and Basin.

3. **To achieve this desired future condition of the river and its management, a different kind of decision making process is needed, drawing from the considerable experience with ecosystem management in other areas of the country yet crafted to reflect the unique qualities and context of the Missouri.** This process would be:
   - Grounded in a systems perspective. It would involve a system-wide management approach that explicitly deals with scale issues: achieving a balance between top-down and bottom-up perspectives, and finding ways to integrate basin-wide goals with subbasin or river reach programmatic activities.
   - Based in credible science. Decision-making would be well informed by current science, would work to build a shared information base, and would be adaptive: using strategies experimentally, incorporating effective monitoring and evaluation, and linking science to management and decision making.
   - Collaborative, inclusive and transparent. It would involve the full range of affected interests and agencies, and be managed to promote respect and fairness in the way interests are dealt with. It would provide multiple opportunities for individuals to work through longstanding anger and animosity.
   - Consensus-seeking. The process would be grounded less in adversarial problem solving approaches that produce winner and losers, and more in approaches that seek to build joint gains. It would promote recognition that each interest is unlikely to achieve all their goals, but that both collectively and individually, most would be better off than with the current state. As one participant noted, "The process should

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be about how to meet the needs, not about how to 'get ours' at the expense of thinking creatively." The courts and political forces would be less "heavy handed" and determinative of direction.

- Adequately supported by resources. Decision making and adaptive management would be supported by adequate resources from diverse sources – governmental and nongovernmental. It would draw on the huge set of resources present in the Basin by finding better ways for achieving partnerships and resource-sharing.
- Able to find ways for agencies to "share power not authority." Participants recognized that a more collaborative approach to resource management raises unique challenges for agencies used to operating as top-down decision makers. Ultimately, the challenge is for agencies to learn how to play a broad set of roles in these processes that lets them share problem-solving power while maintaining their missions and statutory authorities. In the best of cases, a shift in the decision making process should promote a heightened sense of ownership on the part of affected groups both in the problems faced and strategies chosen for dealing with them.

4. **To achieve this vision of the river and its management process, opportunities need to be leveraged and momentum built in a number of complementary ways.** These include:
   - "Kick-off" activities and small successes. Participants highlighted a number of ways to kick-start collaboration, including using the upcoming Lewis and Clark signature events as a way to highlight the river and its history. Given the decades of conflict in the Basin, having small successes in collaborative decision making was also seen as a way to build momentum.
   - A focus on a common future. This future should include a clearer vision of a restored ecosystem and what it could mean for the basin. Some suggested a study of ecosystem services provided by the river would help clarify hidden economic values associated with river restoration. Ultimately, decision making needs to move toward a shared set of objectives in the Basin that is greater than the sum of the aspirations of individual groups, agencies or individuals.
   - Training and capacity-building. Many participants felt that extending collaboration and negotiation training to other agency staff and nongovernmental groups would measurably enhance the capacity of groups in the Basin to engage in new collaborative processes. Training provides somewhat neutral ground for talking about Basin-wide conflicts and issues. Some felt that training opportunities could be offered by agencies and through existing networks such as MRBA and MRNRC. One hope is that such training would provide skills for overcoming defensive postures aimed at protecting positions and maintaining control, at the expense of finding durable solutions to Basin problems.
   - Political leadership and champions. A significant amount of discussion revolved around who could convene and motivate a collaborative effort. Participants offered a number of suggestions including political leaders (current and former) both inside or

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outside the basin, other opinion leaders, media superstars, business leaders, and others. There was a strong sense that broad, bipartisan political leadership was needed for success, and that statesman-like champions were needed to get people's attention, legitimize the process and ultimately provide leverage. Some participants highlighted the Daschle/Bond legislation as a source of political leadership.

- Use of scientific information and the science and management communities as stepping stones. One specific idea was an annual "State of the Health of the River" report produced collaboratively and perhaps facilitated by USGS. Other ideas included: developing a set of easily-accessed GIS-based maps that illustrate the issues within the basin; using the full range of scientific information, including that gathered through traditional ecological knowledge; and better coordinating scientific and management knowledge across the Basin through bi-state partnerships or stronger federal-state-tribal task forces or relationships.

- Public education. Any restoration or management process would need a public education component. Participants highlighted the value of collaboratively producing a video on the river and its management that could be used in public forums. Other educational strategies would be needed to provide political cover, empower individuals in the Basin, and attract media attention to support the process.

- New Basin-wide institution or structures. Many participants felt that the conflicts and problems in the Basin were broader than any existing management institution, and that a new Basin-wide institution or set of structures should be explored. One participant described "a consortium of state representatives as well as federal agencies and tribes whose mission is to find ways to agree or live with reasonable decisions to manage the river." While MRBA, MRNRC and Mni Sose have important roles to play, their potential to link the full range of federal, tribal, state and nongovernmental interests may be limited. A new institution or program might be limited to "river recovery" or broader, and alternative structures may include a policy-level executive committee and a technical workgroup linked to peer-reviewed science. Ultimately, implementation of such an institution may cause change in decision making roles for some agencies.

5. **The broader context of resource management in the U.S. and in the Basin provide opportunities to advance toward this vision.** These include:

    - Congressional funding. Many pointed to other areas of the country which are receiving significant federal funding through Congressional legislation or appropriations aimed at recovering critical natural systems. These include the Everglades, the Platte, the Upper Colorado, Glen Canyon, and CALFED, among others. Participants noted that the Missouri Basin is larger than any of these places geographically, and in the multiplicity of states and size of the aggregate congressional delegation and gubernatorial power. Funding of a Missouri River restoration program that includes both environmental restoration and compatible economic development would provide credibility and incentives that might jumpstart necessary changes in the Basin.

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- Lessons from other places. Based on the case studies presented in the course by out-of-Basin resource managers, as well as the experiences of two field trips on the Missouri (including cooperative management at Ponca State Park involving multiple state and federal agencies and private groups), it is clear that many places are being successful at evolving 21st century management structures that draw on the unique resources and perspectives of multiple partners. The lessons from their experience can provide a template for what could be accomplished in the Missouri.
- A unique and historic time. Many participants pointed to the focus on the Basin associated with the upcoming Lewis and Clark events as an ideal stepping stone toward a more effective river management program. While the tribes viewed the Lewis and Clark focus as a symbol of mixed meaning for their history, it is clear that extraordinary agency funding and public attention will be placed on the river and its ecosystem as a by-product of the events. Using these as leverage for crafting a new vision for the river that reflects its historic state was seen as "low hanging fruit" by a number of participants. There was also a sense that the scientific perspectives in the 2002 National Academy of Sciences report on the Missouri River Ecosystem, and its focus on a collaborative adaptive management process, provided similar legitimacy and opportunities for action.
- The river as a unifying force. Participants noted the significance of the river as an interconnecting and unifying force throughout the Basin. Given the diverse set of cultures, economies and governance processes associated with a basin involving segments of 10 states, 28 tribes, and jurisdictions of more than 10 federal agencies, unifying symbols can be helpful ways to bridge the conflict inherent in this diversity of perspectives and interests.
- A "River Summit." Many participants thought that a summit focusing on the status of decision making for river recovery and ecosystem management would be an important first step. They used the analogy of the Pacific Northwest Forest Summit held in 1993 – an event that helped to transform the debate from impasse to dialogue and planning. Critical to the effectiveness of such a summit is inclusion of a number of items from above: strong, bipartisan, cross-Basin political leadership; individuals who will champion the process; a willingness to look for shared objectives above the existing conflicts; and a focus on the design of a process that can measurably change the potential for on-the-ground action. Such an event could take advantage of the incentives created by the current courtroom situation and the historic focus on the river associated with the Lewis and Clark celebration.

Based on the experiences of other river basins, from conflict can come transformation. The Missouri Basin appears to face a historic moment where a decision making framework suitable for 21st century resource management can be collaboratively developed. Strong leadership is needed from both formal leaders and committed individuals throughout the Basin to take advantage of this moment. Many of the participants in the Sioux City workshop expressed a strong sense of personal commitment to help contribute to this effort.

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