Competing Interests of the Missouri

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The Missouri River, its dams, and navigation channel were designated as an Army Corp of Engineers project in 1944. The corp has been faced with competing interests while keeping maintaining the navigation channel and dams since those years and especially later in the 20th century and into the present one. The main interests are barge operators, environmentalists, farmers, and recreational users of the reservoirs created by the dams. Because of these competing interests, Congress has ordered a five year study of how the Army Corp of Engineers should maintain the river.

Recreational users want more water to be held behind the reservoirs, but this means that important sediment and silt is held behind the dams which depletes the Mississippi Delta. This sediment is important to building up the wetlands that will be vital to protecting the levees that have been rebuilt. The efforts that were undertaken in the Depression era to straighten the Missouri have led to nutrients flowing down the river and eventually ending up in an annual hyoxic dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico. Some efforts have been made to restore wetlands that will soak up some of these nutrients, but these efforts compete with flood-control efforts and navigation efforts. This study is important because it can be used to help maintain some of the world’s rivers that are being dammed now or have recently been dammed.

River or River Basin: Missouri and Mississippi

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