

PEOPLES RESOLUTION HONORING THE GREAT RIVERS

MISSISSIPPI AND MISSOURI

Whereas, the Mississippi River engenders all life along its 2320 mile course from the northern lake country of Minnesota to the Gulf Coast of Mexico; nurturing abundant natural ecosystems; shaping human history and culture; enabling social and economic development; and binding together the communities along its banks; and

Whereas, the forests, food plains, and swamps along its banks are home to diverse and abundant wildlife: deer, bear, fox, coyotes beaver, muskrats, mink, bobcats, squirrels, and many others. The river's waters support an estimated 250 species of fish, as well as turtles, mussels and numerous species of reptiles and amphibians. And, the river provides one of Earth's great migration corridors, giving direction, places of respite, and food to eagles, songbirds, pelicans and over 300 species of birds as they journey north and south with the changing seasons; and

Whereas, the plentiful water, fertile soils, and abundant wildlife have long-supported human, as well as natural, communities. About 600 A.D., the Mound Culture arose near present-day St. Louis, building a flourishing and advanced agricultural society with on the Mississippi flood plain, which flourished for over 600 years, finally disappearing by 1400 AD, overcome by flood and drought. Hunting and gathering peoples came next, moving into the wild rice paddies of the northern river and the mid-river woodlands their descendants . Today, the Mississippi valley is home to many of their descendants, the home of the Cheyenne, Sioux, Ojibwe, Potawatomi, Ho-Chunk, Fox, Kickapoo, Tamaroa, Moingwea, Quapow, and other native American Chicksaw peoples; and

The river made it possible for the first European arrivals to explore and claim the Mississippi Valley. Their nations, and later the infant United States, struggled over ownership of the Mississippi Valley and control of the river for almost 300 years, when it was the boundary between European colonies; and

Whereas, for many the river provided the pathway to freedom and a new life. Many enslaved African Americans escaped by swimming across the river into free western territory. Both enslaved and free African Americans worked on the steamboats in the pre-railroad era, when the Mississippi and its tributaries gave the new nation its only commercial arteries for carrying timber, coal, cotton, wheat and corn down river to seaports and west from Pittsburgh. The networks of rivers and river workers connected southern slaves with free people in the north and helped build an enduring African American culture in the great river basin, even before the Civil War ended.

Whereas, cities were born and grew from the river and its many tributaries. In the north, the river's only waterfall fostered the development of Minneapolis and its mills. In the south, New Orleans grew on a natural levee formed within a crescent shaped river bend and surrounded by lakes and swamps. And, between the two, St Louis grew at the great confluence of the Mississippi and the Missouri, flourishing as the "jumping off" point for river and overland travel to the western territories. Over time, 124 towns and cities in ten states grew along the Mississippi's banks, all unique but all connected by the river; and

Whereas, the Mississippi provides necessities of life for these communities and many more. According to the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI), 20 million people depend upon the river for drinking water.

Whereas, the river and its tributaries also provide food, both directly from the waters and indirectly through agriculture. The floods replenish aquifers and depleted soils. MRCTI reports that river basins produce most of the world's food supply; and, of all Earth's food-producing basins, the Mississippi River Basin, covering thirty-one states, ranks first in the world; and

Whereas, in addition to providing water and food security, the Mississippi provides natural protection, which safeguards people and cities. The rivers' floodplains, inland wetlands, and delta protect human life and health and safeguard property by providing natural filtration and protection against storm surges. Thus, the river provides natural infrastructure, safeguarding communities; and

Whereas, in addition to filling needs and affording protection, the river enriches human life. Its waters, parks and wildlands afford countless recreational and spiritually regenerative opportunities for community members and visitors. It facilitates the migration and movement, not only of birds and people, but also of ideas and innovations, making its cities centers of culture, renowned for their arts, museums, music, and cuisine. And, the river and its major role in our nation's history are deeply imbedded in our national consciousness, a monumental component of our national identity; and

Whereas, today the Mississippi, like other great rivers, faces grave and increasing danger. Globally, the fresh supply is inadequate and diminishing. Only 2.5% of the water on Earth is fresh, and less than 1% is available for human use. According to the United Nations, the dwindling supply of water for drinking and basic sanitation poses an unprecedented threat to human health and safety. One-third of Earth's people now live without safe drinking water, the shortage already fuels international conflicts and desperate mass migrations, and the situation grows worse with global warming and desertification. The desperation in other countries serves as a warning that fresh water must be protected; and

Pollutants have fouled the river and its tributaries. Chemicals commonly used in industrial farming and manufacture, as well as those routinely used in homes, wash into the waters. The pollution threatens the river's aquatic life, and accumulates as the river flows to the Gulf, ultimately creating a huge dead zone in the in the Gulf of Mexico. The marine life, central to the Gulf-Coast culture and economy cannot survive there; and

Whereas, at its most terrible, pollution of local waterways has deprived community members of their health and even their lives. For example, in St. Louis County, radioactive nuclear waste poisoned Coldwater Creek, which flows through residential neighborhoods and into the Missouri River, near its confluence with the Mississippi. This toxic waste was generated by nuclear weapon production during World War II and stored in underground tanks, which eventually leaked. Rains, flooding, and ground-water movement swept the waste into the creek and the rivers. Today, 6,000 residents of the area have been diagnosed with various cancers thought to result from their playing in the creek as children and living near it as adults. The tragedy of Coldwater Creek makes it impossible to ignore this truth: poisoning the waterways poisons all life connected to them, including human life; and

Whereas, climate change has increased weather extremes, which has intensified flooding. Since 2011, St. Louis has experienced so-called "lifetime" floods on three separate occasions. In 2019, record floods submerged 1200 homes in Iowa alone, and caused an estimated 1.68 Billion Dollars in damage. The innumerable , levees, dikes, culverts, bypasses and other engineering works constructed and enhanced to "control" the river, but are no substitute for the natural process of floodplain absorption , however, floodplains have been developed and sealed over to meet housing and commercial needs Attempts to prevent flooding in some

areas have intensified it in others, as flood plain development flood plains has displaced flood waters into previously secure areas; and

Whereas, flood-related damage -- losses of life and property, health and safety hazards, disruption of commerce and basic governmental services, and extraordinary public and private expense -- has prompted community members and local advocacy groups to call upon their local governments for protection against the mounting threats to the river and to their health, safety and welfare of human and natural communities. And, local governments along the Mississippi have united through the Cities & Towns Initiative to forge a new relationship with the river by, among other things: protecting it from pollutants; renaturing its banks; restoring and conserving the wetlands, marshes, forests, and grasslands within its basin; and promoting sustainable agricultural practices; and

Whereas, similar calls to action have come from political and religious leaders around the world. The United Nations General Assembly has emphasized our ineluctable connection to the natural world by resolving and warning that humans cannot live in harmony with one another unless they live in harmony with Nature. Therefore, the UN has called upon the countries of the world to promote respect for the natural world by adopting a new paradigm in which Nature is no longer viewed as mere human property but is, instead, recognized as a single system to which all life belongs. Likewise, in his encyclical Laudato Si on Care of Our Common Home, Pope Francis has called upon all people to recognize the sanctity of creation and to care for the Earth. And, the world-wide scientific community also teaches us that all life on Earth is bound together in one living and interdependent system which, ultimately, flourishes or withers as one; and

Whereas, in order to promote human life in harmony with Nature, national and local governments in South America, India, New Zealand, Mexico and elsewhere have recognized the rights of rivers, forests, and other elements of Nature to exist and flourish; and

Whereas, the communities of the Mississippi river and other rivers may best promote their present and future health and welfare by joining this movement to live in harmony with Nature, respecting its existence and rights, beginning with the life-giving waters upon which all life depends; and

Whereas, in joining this world-wide movement, the [City/Town] Council also intends to forge new connections, not only with the natural world, but also within our community and to thereby enhance the community unity, building a better future by bridging the divides that separate us as individuals, thus enhancing our own humanity.

NOW THEREFORE, THE _____ OF THE [TOWN/CITY] OF _____ HEREBY RESOLVES THAT:

SECTION 1. The health, well-being, and future prosperity of the Mississippi River communities is inseparable from the welfare of the river and its natural environment, which are the foundation of our history, culture and economy.

SECTION 2. We therefor recognize that we must serve as stewards of the river, recognizing and respecting the right of all river communities, both human and natural, to exist and flourish in harmony with one another.

SECTION 3. Recognition of our responsibilities and the river communities' rights shall be and hereby is incorporated into the public policy of the [Town/City] of _____, as a guiding principle.

SECTION 4. The [Town/City] of _____ shall fulfill its responsibilities and honor and effectuate these rights by, among other things, incorporating them into local law, policy, programs and practices as necessary or advisable to better protect and sustain the river and the it supports.

SECTION 5. The [Town/City] Clerk shall certify to the adoption of this resolution, and thenceforth and thereafter it shall be in full force and affect.

Approved as to Form:

Dated: _____

Executed:

MJM

5/2/20 - MJM

4/15/20 - MJM