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Save The Date!

Our 2016 Gala fundraising benefit, held in partnership with Ducks Unlimited, is scheduled for **Thursday, September 22** at the Coronado Ballroom (on Lindell Blvd. in midtown St. Louis.) Please mark your calendars to join us that evening for a very special event!



Great Rivers Habitat Alliance Partners



NRA-ILA



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Great Rivers Habitat Alliance is a 501(c)3 public charity and donations to GRHA are tax deductible as allowed by law.



Great Rivers Habitat Alliance Opposes Maryland Heights Floodplain Development

Believe it or not, moving the Rams to Los Angeles may not have been Stan Kroenke's worst move for St. Louis. As bad as moving the Rams is, his latest goal could surpass it: turning 1,800 acres of irreplaceable floodplain in Maryland Heights into our region's latest mega-development. This terrible idea has all the right ingredients for bad public policy:

- Just two months after deadly flooding devastated parts of the St. Louis-area, this proposal would take 1,800 more acres of floodplain out of the ecosystem and turn it into developed land.
- According to the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, Kroenke and his partners are widely expected to ask for significant tax incentives for the project. That's right. They want to use other people's money to take 1,800 acres out of the floodplain, just two months after deadly floods swept through our area.
- It really does not matter to us who is doing the project. We are opposed to it. But we certainly understand that the average St. Louisan may be livid that the same man who just moved the Rams out of town is back holding his hand out for floodplain development subsidies.

The news of the proposal came early in February when the *Post-Dispatch* reported on the afternoon of Feb. 4 that the Maryland Heights City Council would be issuing a Request-for-Proposal (RFP) to redevelop the floodplain at its meeting that night. Due in large part to the short notice, the *Post* later reported that "only three people" showed up to oppose the RFP. Great Rivers Habitat Alliance (GRHA) is proud to tell you that our new executive director, David Stokes, was one of those three.

He spoke to the City Council during the public comment segment and asked city officials to reconsider the move. Two residents of Maryland Heights also spoke against it. Judging from online comments, radio callers, and water cooler conversations throughout St. Louis, far more than "only three people" oppose this outrageous proposal.

The board and staff of GRHA promise you that we will vehemently oppose this proposal. Maryland Heights has asked developers to submit their proposals by April 15. During the entire process, GRHA will be leading the fight against both the subsidies and the entire development in general. This plan is wrong for our region. How much worse will flooding get, how much more land will we take out of the ecosystem, and how many more people will be harmed before we learn that floodplain development has terrible consequences?

Great Rivers Habitat Alliance Hires New Executive Director

We are excited to announce that Great Rivers Habitat Alliance has hired a new executive director. David Stokes began working for GRHA on February 15, although prior to his official start date, he stepped up to testify on behalf of GRHA on two occasions in early February.

Stokes comes to GRHA after nine years with the Show-Me Institute (SMI), a Missouri-focused free-market think tank. He did policy work for seven years at SMI before taking over fundraising and development in 2014. One of his major policy focus-areas was reforming Tax Increment Financing and other tax subsidies. Stokes was a regular guest on radio and television programs throughout Missouri discussing a wide-variety of policy issues. Prior to working at SMI, Stokes worked as an aide to former St. Louis County Councilman, Kurt Odenwald, for five years.

In his short time with GRHA, Stokes has already appeared before three legislative bodies seeking the reforms for which this organization was originally founded to fight. He intends to regularly appear before government decision-makers, work with citizen groups, represent GRHA to the media, publish online commentary about floodplain issues, and do whatever it takes to achieve real change for Missouri. Changing policy to preserve our region's Confluence and our state's floodplain is still what GRHA is all about. Stokes said he is thrilled to be a part of this movement.





Great Rivers Habitat Alliance Testifies Before the Missouri General Assembly

On February 9, GRHA executive director, David Stokes, testified before the Missouri House Ways and Means Committee in favor of House Bills 1434 and 1600, which will tighten the ability to use Tax Increment Financing (TIF) in certain instances and could be beneficial to limiting the use of TIF in the floodplain around the Confluence. The House bills now have been combined into HB 1434 and its sponsors are Missouri Representatives Andrew Koenig and Dan Shaul. While the sponsors are both Republicans, the bill has strong bipartisan support. The week after Stokes and others testified in favor of the legislation, the Ways and Means Committee successfully passed HB 1434 out of committee – a necessary step on its long journey to hopefully becoming law.

The following week, Stokes testified in favor of Senate Bill 805 before the Senate Jobs, Economic Development, and Local Government Committee. SB 805 is the Senate version of HB 1434 and also enacts beneficial TIF reforms that could positively enforce further limits on floodplain subsidies. The sponsor is Sen. Bob Onder of St. Charles, and this bill also received bipartisan support at the Senate hearing.

GRHA intends to stay active following this important legislation during the current session that ends in May. We are 100 percent committed to doing whatever it takes to change floodplain development and subsidy policy in Missouri.

Conservation Easements Benefit the Confluence

One of the best ways to preserve the heritage of the Confluence, as well as floodplains throughout Missouri, is the conservation easement program. Statutory changes that GRHA and many other conservation groups supported in 2011 improved the process for conservation easements in Missouri. Conservation easements allow private property owners to gain tax benefits for committing to retain their land for agricultural, recreational, forestry, hunting, and other uses in perpetuity. In a conservation easement, the land remains completely private and the easement gives no right for anyone to trespass.

Through a partnership with Ducks Unlimited and other conservation groups, GRHA can help facilitate an easement for your rural or scenic property. We would be pleased to talk to you if you are interested in learning more about conservation easements in Missouri.



President's Column

If Not Now...

Great Rivers Habitat Alliance (GRHA) opposes all development in the floodplains in the Confluence area. That is our mission. The Confluence is our region's defining natural resource and it is under constant attack. Floodplains perform vital roles protecting both human and animal populations. They are essential resources and must be protected. If we don't do it, who will? If not now, when?

The flooding in late December brought focus to two things:

1. Natural causes seem to be resulting in greater and more frequent rainfall.
2. The addition of man-made structures in and around the floodplains have drastically increased flooding outside of it.

Within a few weeks of the floodwaters subsiding in our region, there was another announcement of a proposed major floodplain development. This one is championed by Stan Kroenke from the Walton family with plans to build a commercial – residential development on the banks of the Missouri River in Maryland Heights. This is the same developer who developed Chesterfield Commons after the Great Flood of 1993 that devastated Chesterfield Valley. Mr. Kroenke seems to care more about his pocketbook than about St. Louis and its natural resources. GRHA will stand in opposition to this development and any others like it.

Another development of grave concern is the proposed Port of Lincoln project, which would absorb the entire Mississippi floodplain between Winfield and Foley, Missouri. This massive inland port proposes to link barge, rail, and trucking to transport goods to national and international destinations. It calls for a 500-year levee which would isolate more than 6,000 acres from the floodplain. Untold damage to natural habitats and massive additional flooding could result. The project's backers have tremendous resources. This one will be a huge challenge to stop. GRHA will use any and all legal means to oppose Port of Lincoln because if we don't, who will? We cannot stand by and allow it without a fight.

We are pleased to see that while it is a symbolic move, the St. Charles County Council went on the record opposing the development in Maryland Heights. We hope to see more civic leaders follow suit on this and other proposals within flood-prone areas of our region.

There are many other developments that are being planned in which GRHA will stand in opposition. We have become the most vocal opponent of developments in the floodplain and, unfortunately, in many cases, we are the only opponent.

I am proud to welcome David Stokes as Executive Director of GRHA. With David at the helm, we look forward to advancing our cause in the following ways:

1. Advocacy of sustainable floodplain management.
2. Communication with regional stakeholders.
3. Promotion of conservation practices.

If you are reading this, you probably already have a stake in this region and may care as deeply as I do about protecting it. I am asking you to join this movement in a meaningful way.

If not now, when?

If not us, who?

Sincerely,

Andy Spann
President
Great Rivers Habitat Alliance



Founder's Corner

Our mission at Great Rivers Habitat Alliance is clear: we exist to protect the Confluence of the Mississippi, Missouri, and Illinois Rivers. We do many things to accomplish that goal, but in the end, the preservation of the Confluence, its habitat, floodplains, and wetlands, is why this organization was created in 2000.

At that time, conservationists in St. Louis and St. Charles were becoming concerned about unmitigated development in the region's floodplain. Considering that the reaction to the Great Flood of 1993 was to build an enormous mall in the heart of the Chesterfield floodplain that had been covered in floodwaters, how could one not become concerned? Rick Holton, Sr., Don C. Musick, III, myself, and others formed Great Rivers Habitat Alliance (GRHA) at the time to take on the Confluence preservation fight.

We hired Wayne Freeman as our first executive director and began to spread our simple message that continuous development within our floodplains is bad for our region. It is bad for our environment, bad for our quality of life, bad for taxpayers, bad in the short run, and even worse in the long run. It is bad for everyone except the developers.

Just as our organization got up and running, the City of St. Peters in St. Charles County announced a plan to develop 1,640 acres of irreplaceable floodplain into a business park, indoor recreational complex, homes, and more. The project progressed with the city continually issuing bonds backed by Tax Increment Financing (TIF) subsidies to construct the project until GRHA sued to stop the project in 2005. That lawsuit quickly became a major focus for GRHA for several years.

There is a time and a place where you simply have to stand your ground and fight. The 370 Lakeside development in St. Peters was that time and place for GRHA. We proved in our lawsuit that the Army Corp of Engineers did not follow its own rules for this project. It never performed the Alternate Resource Study as it was required. We demonstrated that the entire planning and evaluation process the city undertook with its hired guns was a joke. (How can a government declare farmland "blighted"?) Officials for St. Charles County intervened in the case ON OUR SIDE, as they clearly saw the harm this project was doing to the larger region.

Unfortunately, the courts deferred to legislative intent and decided —no matter how absurd the laws were and no matter how much the Army Corp of Engineers and other government agencies ignored their own rules — to allow the City of St. Peters to move ahead with its enormous, floodplain-destroying plan.

While we lost that battle, we are winning the war, as that particular development has been stalled due to its own fundamental weaknesses. Just as important, we served notice to everyone who wished to develop in the Confluence that we are willing to fight for the preservation of our region's heritage.

While the lawsuit was being contested, GRHA had other important victories for our cause. In 2007, then-Missouri Governor Matt Blunt signed the "Hunting Heritage Protection Act." That legislation, which we strongly backed, limited the future use of TIF in the floodplains of Missouri and guaranteed the rights of sportsmen to use the floodplain. (While that bill greatly limited the use of TIF in the floodplains, it did not eliminate it entirely, as we are seeing now in Maryland Heights. Expanding the legislation to all Missouri floodplains is a continuing goal of GRHA.)

When the court fight ended in 2012, GRHA focused on building partnerships with like-minded organizations. You can see the full list of those partners in this newsletter, which includes such organizations as Ducks Unlimited and Great Rivers Environmental Law Center. We value the relationship we built with all of these groups under the direction of GRHA's then executive director Dan Burkemper.

Furthermore, we have developed excellent working relationships with a number of elected officials, including U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill, U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt, St. Charles County Executive Steve Ehlmann, Missouri Sen. Bob Onder, St. Charles County Councilman Joe Brazil, and many others.

We are excited to be entering a new phase with the recent hiring of David Stokes as our executive director. Our current board, under the direction of Chairman, Jim Blair, and President, Andy Spann, is reinvigorated and ready to further grow GRHA. Unfortunately, the quest to turn every green space into a new shopping mall never stops, nor does the attempt to have taxpayers subsidize these future disasters-in-waiting.

We are going to actively oppose the newest floodplain proposal in Maryland Heights. We will oppose unnecessary new ports and levees along our great rivers. We will fight to protect the rich heritage that the Confluence provides all of us. As you read the accounts of everything we have been doing so far in 2016, I hope that you will choose to support our mission at Great Rivers Habitat Alliance. You can be assured that every dollar you give will be solely focused on the preservation of the Confluence and the protection of our water and wildlife heritage.

Adolphus A. Busch, IV
Board Member
Great Rivers Habitat Alliance



PRESERVING THE 100-YEAR CONFLUENCE FLOOD PLAIN SINCE 2000

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2016 New Year's Holiday Flooding

Great Rivers Habitat Alliance works to preserve the rich heritage and natural beauty of the 100-year Confluence Flood Plain. We have been advancing this cause through educating local decision makers, citizens, and youth. Together, we can save this irreplaceable land for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Great Rivers believes the long-term benefits of a natural Confluence far outweigh any small, short-term monetary gains made by destroying it.

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