Like many other terrible public policy suggestions, no matter how often the New Madrid Levee gets rejected, it keeps resurfacing. The levee project will benefit a small number of influential families, but will be a detriment to wildlife, taxpayers, the environment, and more. That is why numerous government agencies and private organizations like GRHA oppose it so strongly. Your support allows us to participate in opportunities like this by sending Stokes to bring our message of floodplain conservation straight to high-ranking D.C. officials.

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Missouri Voters Have a Choice on Parks, Soil, and Water Sales Tax

On Nov. 8, Missouri voters will have an opportunity to renew the state’s 1/10 of a cent sales tax that helps fund soil and water conservation efforts as well as the state park system. We know that nobody likes paying taxes, and as a 501c3 public charity, GRHA cannot take a side on this issue. We simply wish to encourage people to continue down the long November ballot to the propositions at the end and cast their vote on whether or not to renew this sales tax at its current level. This is not a tax increase. It renews an existing tax that funds vital needs like our state parks and water conservation efforts. At GRHA, we know first-hand the improvements for our state that this tax has provided, and we hope you cast an informed vote on Nov. 8.

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GRHA Fall Policy Updates

Great Rivers Habitat Alliance is constantly involved in a number of policy issues. Here is a concise status report on several of them:

Maryland Heights: The city has pulled back on the development proposals for the valuable, undeveloped land along the Howard Bend levee. Maryland Heights is attempting to improve the stormwater control systems in the area. That is the good news. But the bad news is that the city has made those internal improvements, they are expected to gain more full-steam ahead on destroying hundreds of acres of farmland in order to use tax subsidies to pay for Stan Kroenke’s next mega-development. Using tax dollars to subsidize this impermissible floodplain is shameful. GRHA was one of the leading groups opposing this proposal before they were temporarily shelved, and we will continue to oppose these plans vociferously.

Sny Island Levee District: It is well-documented that the Sny Island District has been improperly raising its levées above the authorized height, and sending more floodwaters onto Missouri lands in Lincoln, Pike, and St. Charles counties. Sny Island has been cited by both the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) for its actions. GRHA has been working with partners to keep the pressure on ACOE and IDNR to compel Sny Island to lower its levées.

Valley Park: GRHA has worked with other activists to document how the ACOE constructed the Valley Park levee higher than the 100-year floodplain level set by FEMA. While that may be great for Valley Park, it is very harmful to the communities around Valley Park in last December’s devastating flooding. Remember, you do not stop the flood, you simply move it; and when you build higher than authorized, you send the water damage to people who are, understandably, not expecting the one that is finally adopted.

2016 Water Resource and Development Act (WRDA): GRHA is working with allies and partners to monitor developments to this important federal legislation. While the act has many good things in it, the Senate version includes language that may benefit levee districts such as Sny Island, which constantly seek to avoid needed levee regulations. The House version does not have that language, and GRHA is doing our best to see that the House version is the one that is finally adopted.

Great Rivers Habitat Alliance in the Media

Getting our message of smarter floodplain policies and habitat conservation out to the public is imperative. GRHA is always looking for opportunities to educate people and spread our message via the media. In September, our executive director was quoted in the Wall Street Journal about the Valley Park levee issue (9/15/16). He also appeared in a KSDK Channel 5 series story on the same issue. So far in 2016, Stokes and GRHA have appeared several times on KMOX and KFVS, Fox 2 News, in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch stories, and several other media outlets, including the Hannibal Career-Post, West Newsmagazine, and the St. Louis Business-Journal.

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.

Great Rivers Habitat Alliance launches YouTube Channel

Supporters of GRHA can watch the videos we have created so far in 2016 on our new YouTube channel. Simply go to YouTube and search for Great Rivers Habitat Alliance. Our page will come up and you can bookmark it to stay informed on our latest work. In 2016, we have produced two videos. The first was on the proposal to develop the floodplain in Maryland Heights by Stan Karsemeier, and the second is the video we played at the partnership dinner with Du on September. We hope you enjoy them both.

President’s Column

In early October, the board and staff of Great Rivers Habitat Alliance engaged in a day of long-term strategic planning for our organization. Under professional guidance, our leadership intently focused on the long-term goals and mission of GRHA. I will spare you the minutia of the session, but my point in sharing with you the results of our session: We have identified that GRHA is driven to be the best-managed and most efficient non-profit that we can be. Our donors deserve to know that their dollars are being wisely spent, and I promise you that the leadership and staff take that responsibility seriously.

If you are a donor of GRHA, I hope you will read this newsletter carefully for an update on our latest projects. (And if you are not a donor, please consider becoming one.) Our central focus will continue to be on protecting the Confluence, but we are also active in other forces that affect the Confluence. That is why you see us working on issues such as the New Madrid levee proposal, the Sny Island (Ill.) Levee District, and the new federal floodplain building standards for projects with federal money. Rivers are not vacuums. Policies in pollution control, levee and dam building, and much more all around the country — and especially throughout the enormous Mississippi River watershed — shape the health of the Confluence.

Our rivers and their floodplains and wetlands habitat are Missouri’s and Illinois’ greatest natural resources. Our mission is to preserve them forever, because (to quote GRHA’s Rick Holton, Sr.) once they are gone… they are gone forever.

Sincerely,
Andy Spahn
President
Great Rivers Habitat Alliance
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St. Louis: The Levee proposal, the Sny Island (Ill.) Levee proposal for Lincoln County, Mo. As more details become available, the big, huge scope of this project and the great harm it will bring to habitat and wildlife are becoming apparent. We will have more full information on this issue in the near future.

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For at least a generation, the New Madrid project’sinosaurous proposal has been advanced 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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Follow us on Facebook: GreatRiversHabitatAlliance

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