

March 15, 2016

Testimony Before the Missouri House of Representatives Local Government Committee Regarding
House Bill 1042

David Stokes, Great Rivers Habitat Alliance

Honorable Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee today. My name is David Stokes. I am the executive director of the Great Rivers Habitat Alliance, a nonprofit, conservation organization dedicated to preserving floodplains and wetlands for recreation, agriculture, and hunting along the Confluence of the Mississippi, Missouri, and Illinois rivers. The ideas presented here are my own.

House Bill 1042 is smart, modest legislation that simply gives some local county governments the authority to better improve flood protections within the area of their own counties defined as the 100-year flood level, if they choose to. This is not a top-down mandate; nor is it radical. It simply gives some counties the option that other counties have; to impose a tighter flood development standard within the 100-year flood level boundary if they choose to. There is nothing unheard of about tightening up these requirements, either. Many other states have already done so statewide, including Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois.

Floods in this state are becoming more frequent and severe. Our senses are not deceiving us. To give one example, 19 of the 27 highest crests recorded in St. Charles have been since 1982 for an area whose records go as far back as 1785.

Pick any Corps of Engineers flood gauge and the numbers are similar.

There are many factors at play here, but the primary reasons are overdevelopment within our floodplains and overreliance on levees in a failed attempt to control our great rivers. The primary reaction to the Great Flood of 1993 was to turn the Chesterfield floodplain into a gigantic shopping mall. Enough said.

I would like to enter the following studies into the record for the benefit of the committee. Each of these studies documents the harms we are doing within our floodways and floodplains and the need for better policy in Missouri:

- 1) Pinter, Nicholas, et al, "Modeling residual flood risk behind levees, Upper Mississippi River, USA," *Environmental Science & Policy*, Vol. 58, 2016.
- 2) Belt, Jr., C.B., "The 1973 Flood and Man's Constriction of the Mississippi River," *Science*, Vol. 189, No. 4204, August 29, 1975, pp. 681-684.
- 3) Criss, Robert, and Luo, Mingming, "River Management and Flooding: The Lesson of December 2015 – January 2016, Central USA," *Journal of Earth Science*, Vol. 27, No. 1, February 2016, pp. 117-122.
- 4) Pinter, Nicholas, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back on U.S. Floodplains," *Science Magazine*, Vol. 308, April 8, 2005, pp. 207 – 208.

Our current development policies at the local level in Missouri have allowed the commercial and residential development of irreplaceable floodplain with predictably harmful results. Flooding is worse. Taxpayers are on the hook for substantial, preventable losses. Most importantly, lives are put at risk. HB 1042 gives local counties the authority to improve things within their own area if they choose to.

Our great rivers are for everyone, not just the certain industries and related interests. Floodplain developments within the 100-year flood level areas along the Mississippi, Missouri, and other rivers deserves greater control as we try to balance the many, varied interests and uses of our rivers. HB 1042 will help to accomplish that.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee today.