**IMPORTANT NOTE:** *This press release for the America’s Watershed Initiative Report Card is embargoed until Wednesday, October 14.*

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**Mississippi River Basin Receives D+ in First-Ever Report Card**

***But leaders note challenges present opportunities for improvement***

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**ST. LOUIS, Oct. 14, 2015**—Leaders representing organizations from more than 20 states gathered in St. Louis on Oct. 14 to announce the release of a first-ever Report Card for the entire Mississippi River basin, which stretches across all or part of 31 U.S. states and covers more than 41 percent of the continental United States. The leaders were part of America’s Watershed Initiative, which has worked with more than 700 stakeholders and experts from over 400 business, government and science organizations to identify the key measurements and data sources to grade six goals for the watershed: clean, abundant water; marine transportation; flood control and risk reduction; the economy; recreation; and ecosystem health.

The report card also provides assessments for five major sub-basins—the Upper Mississippi River, Lower Mississippi River, the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers, the Arkansas and Red Rivers, and the Missouri River. Overall, the grade average for the six goals for entire watershed was a D+.

“The rivers and waters in the Mississippi watershed are the life-blood for our nation, our economy and our communities. More than half the services and goods in America are produced with water flowing in this system,” said steering America’s Watershed committee member Steve Mathies. “Raising the grade for the watershed is critical for our continued economic vitality and that of our children and grandchildren.”

America’s Watershed Steering Committee member Teri Goodmann, who is the assistant manager of the City of Dubuque, Iowa, also noted that the rivers in America’s Watershed provide clean drinking water for millions of people and water for farms and ranches that produce $54 billion of food and goods each year. “We all need clean drinking water. Clearly, our future health and economic growth in the United States depends on the clean and abundant waters that flow in the Mississippi River watershed,” she said.

Positive results in some of the basins and for some goals across the entire watershed were offset by significant challenges. Specifically, the assessments for transportation, water supply, and flood control and risk reduction received some of the worst grades. Two of the three measurements for transportation—infrastructure condition and infrastructure maintenance—received the lowest grades of all goals measured.

“Our aging water infrastructure desperately weakens America's capability to reliably and efficiently move and export food and goods. It directly impacts people’s ability to live safely and productively in communities along the world’s most productive alluvial valley. Reinvestment in our high-return water infrastructure is our legacy," said Stephen Gambrell, Director of the Mississippi River Commission. "The water commerce network, which depends on our heartland rivers, moves millions of tons of goods safely, reliably and efficiently, generating billions in economic value for the United States. The longer we wait to invest in raising the grade of America's Watershed, the more it will cost our children, our national security and the nation’s future opportunities.”

The report card also addressed watershed-wide challenges, such as the size of the hypoxic or “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico and the rate of coastal wetland loss in Louisiana, with both being rated as “poor.” A full discussion of the grades for the six goals and technical documentation with data sources and calculations is available at [AmericasWatershed.org/ReportCard](http://www.americaswatershed.org/reportcard).

“The report card is not a goal into itself—it’s a tool to support a conversation among lead­ers who are willing to develop and implement shared solutions to the water management challenges facing our states and nation,” said Michael Reuter, director of The Nature Conservancy’s North America Water Program. “This shared vision will be used to build the partnerships we need to meet these critical management challenges. Knowing what’s important and how to measure it is the foundation for us to take collaborative action to improve the watershed.”

The Report Card represents the first time these six broad goals have been assessed and presented in a single document for the Mississippi River Watershed. “Goals without measures aren’t achieved,” said Harald “Jordy” Jordahl, director of America’s Watershed Initiative. “The report card helps develop in one place a clear measure of the watershed to focus action.”

Jordahl said the report card results point to three types of action needed for the watershed. First, new investments at state and local levels and from the private sector are needed alongside federal funding to ensure that America’s Watershed can provide the critical benefits the nation relies on now and into the future. Next, more collaboration among diverse stakeholders is needed to better connect and target these investments, create long-term partnerships and provide broader multiple benefits for communities, the economy and nature. And lastly, Jordahl said he hopes America’s Watershed Initiative will encourage even more engagement throughout the watershed, starting at the local level to produce solutions that can be shared and scaled up across the entire watershed.

During the St. Louis meeting, the leaders pledged to work together to develop a three-year action plan with specific actions to raise the grade for the Mississippi River watershed. Additional detailed reports on the Report Card findings and next steps will be released in the months ahead.

The AWI report card technical team included leadership from America’s Watershed Initiative Steering committee members Dr. Chuck Somerville from Marshall University/Ohio River Basin Alliance and Dr. Rainy Shorey from Caterpillar. Heath Kelsey from the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science facilitated the process, which included two summits, workshops in each of the major basins of the Mississippi River watershed, data collection and analysis.

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*Formed in 2010, America’s Watershed Initiative is a collaboration including both public- and private-sector leaders from the 31 state Mississippi River Watershed seeking solutions to ensure America’s watershed remains viable for future generations. The Steering Committee includes leaders from throughout the watershed with a diversity of positions and sectors including conservation, navigation, agriculture, flood control and risk reduction, industry, academics, basin associations, local, state and federal government agencies. Learn more at* [*AmericasWatershed.org*](http://www.americaswatershed.org)*.*