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Fact Sheet

EPA Collaborates with State and Federal Partners to Study the State of the Great Rivers

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Research and Development is embarking on an ambitious research program to demonstrate methods for assessing and monitoring the ecological condition of the Great Rivers in the central United States. Beginning in July 2004, field crews from cooperating state and federal agencies will sample biological organisms, water, and sediment in the Upper Mississippi River system, Ohio River, Missouri River from Montana to Missouri, and Mississippi River from St. Paul, Minnesota, to Cairo, Illinois. This work is part of EPA's Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Program, a national program working in partnership with states, other federal agencies, tribes, and local groups to develop the science to inventory natural resources and report their condition. Better methods will yield better information for making more informed management decisions for the rivers.

Because the size and complexity of these rivers make it impossible to measure everything everywhere, a statistical process similar to taking a public opinion survey will be used. Measurements at randomly selected sites will provide representative information about large sections of river or an entire river within a state. The project is designed to report conditions at large scales. Crews will have appropriate state and federal collection permits and will be working with state resource managers.

This project will show how to produce a Great Rivers "report card." The first report card will show how the rivers are doing today. Future report cards will show whether conditions are getting better or worse. "Grades" or indicators of river condition will be developed from the diversity of biological communities, contaminants in fish tissue and sediments, water quality, and shoreline features. While condition reports will be useful to managers, demonstrating how to compile the reports in the future is an important project goal. Samples will be collected in the summers of 2004 and 2005. Some samples will be taken within the main-channel, while other samples will be taken along half-mile-long sections of shore. EPA expects to produce a report on the condition of these Great River ecosystems in 2006. In the end, better monitoring methods will make more information available to better manage the rivers.

A partnership of state and federal agencies has been assembled to conduct this research. Scientists from the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Biological Resources Division in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and Water Resources Division Districts in Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Montana will help EPA coordinate the project and collect the samples. Other important partners are: Ohio River Valley Sanitation Commission, Departments of Natural Resources in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa, Illinois Natural History Survey, Missouri Department Of Conservation, the Nebraska Game and Fish Commission, North Dakota Department of Health, South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Universities of Iowa, Louisville, and Southwestern Missouri State, Stroud Water Center, and private contractors.

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