Executive Summary

Protecting the Mississippi–Missouri Confluence

An Environmental Assessment of Routing Alternatives for the Eastern Missouri Grid Transformation Project

Prepared by

A Coalition of Conservation Organizations, Landowners, Hunters, Anglers, Scientists, Engineers, and Citizens of the Mississippi–Missouri Confluence

Purpose

This Executive Summary presents the principal findings and recommendations of an environmental assessment evaluating proposed transmission corridors associated with the **Eastern Missouri Grid Transformation Project** within the Mississippi–Missouri Confluence. The assessment has been prepared by a coalition of conservation organizations, private landowners, hunters, anglers, scientists, engineers, and concerned citizens who share a common objective: supporting reliable electric infrastructure while protecting one of the Midwest's most important floodplain ecosystems.

The coalition recognizes the importance of maintaining and modernizing the regional electric transmission system. Nothing contained in this assessment should be interpreted as opposition to the need for reliable electric service or necessary improvements to the transmission grid. Instead, this report evaluates whether proposed transmission facilities can be routed in a manner that better avoids environmentally sensitive areas while meeting the engineering objectives of the project.

The central question addressed by this assessment is straightforward:

Can the project's objectives be achieved through routing alternatives that reduce impacts to floodplains, wildlife habitat, and decades of public and private conservation investment?

This report concludes that this question warrants careful evaluation during the environmental review and permitting process. The assessment is supported by regional mapping, wildlife observations, floodplain documentation, and other exhibits contained in Appendix A, which provide additional context for evaluating routing alternatives and existing environmental conditions.

A Nationally Significant Landscape

The Mississippi–Missouri Confluence is one of North America's most important floodplain landscapes. Formed by the confluence of two of the continent's largest rivers, the region supports an interconnected mosaic of bottomland hardwood forests, floodplain wetlands, native grasslands, agricultural lands, riparian corridors, managed wildlife habitat, and conservation properties.

The Confluence also occupies one of the most important portions of the Mississippi Flyway. Millions of migratory birds pass through the region annually, relying upon these habitats during migration and wintering periods. Bald eagles, waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, raptors, deer, turkey, beaver, and countless other wildlife species depend upon this landscape.

The ecological value of the Confluence extends well beyond individual properties. Wildlife populations depend upon the continuity of the larger landscape, making habitat fragmentation an important consideration whenever new infrastructure corridors are proposed.

Decades of Conservation Investment

The present condition of the Confluence is the result of generations of conservation investment and stewardship.

Federal, state, regional, nonprofit, and private organizations have collectively invested substantial financial resources in restoring wetlands, managing floodplain forests, protecting wildlife habitat, improving water quality, expanding public recreation opportunities, and preserving open space. Organizations including Great Rivers Habitat Alliance, Ducks Unlimited, Great Rivers Greenway, the Missouri Department of Conservation, Audubon, and numerous local conservation partners have worked alongside private landowners to create an interconnected conservation landscape of regional significance.

Privately managed conservation properties—including long-established hunting and fishing clubs—play a vital role in this network. These lands have been actively managed for wildlife habitat, floodplain restoration, invasive species control, and water management for decades. Together with adjacent public lands, they create a continuous landscape that supports ecological functions extending far beyond individual property boundaries.

Documented market transactions indicate that certain large conservation properties within the Confluence command substantial per-acre values, reflecting both their ecological significance and the rarity of large, contiguous floodplain landscapes.

Principal Findings

The assessment identifies several key findings.

1. The proposed corridors traverse an actively functioning floodplain.

Flood photographs collected over multiple flood events document widespread and recurring inundation throughout portions of the project area. Roads become impassable, structures are surrounded by floodwaters, fields remain inundated, and access is often limited to boats. These documented conditions illustrate the dynamic nature of the floodplain and the engineering challenges associated with constructing and maintaining major transmission infrastructure within it.

2. The project area contains significant wildlife resources.

The proposed corridors occur within habitat used by migratory birds, waterfowl, deer, turkey, and numerous other wildlife species. The coalition has also documented bald eagle nests within the broader project area. These documented and suspected nesting locations are presented in Appendix A and support additional biological evaluation before final route selection.These observations support comprehensive field surveys and coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service before final route selection.

3. The project affects an interconnected conservation landscape.

The Confluence should not be viewed as a collection of isolated parcels. Rather, it functions as a unified ecological system composed of public conservation areas and privately stewarded conservation lands. Fragmentation of this landscape has the potential to affect wildlife movement, habitat connectivity, and long-term management.

4. Existing transportation and utility corridors warrant careful evaluation.

Where practicable, routing new transmission facilities within or adjacent to existing transportation or utility corridors may reduce habitat fragmentation, minimize new disturbances, and lessen impacts to conservation lands. Such alternatives should receive thorough engineering and environmental evaluation during project planning.

5. Floodplain engineering presents long-term considerations.

Recurring flooding, saturated soils, erosion, access limitations, and long-term maintenance requirements should all be carefully considered when comparing alternative routes. These factors affect not only environmental resources but also construction methods, operational reliability, and future maintenance.

Recommendations

Based upon the information presented in this assessment, the coalition respectfully recommends that the project proponents and reviewing agencies:

- Thoroughly evaluate routing alternatives that utilize existing transportation and utility corridors where practicable.
- Minimize new transmission corridors through intact floodplain conservation landscapes.
- Conduct comprehensive field surveys for bald eagles and other sensitive wildlife resources before final route selection.
- Evaluate floodplain engineering constraints using documented site conditions, including recurring inundation and access limitations.
- Consider cumulative impacts to habitat connectivity and long-term conservation investments.
- Continue meaningful consultation with landowners, conservation organizations, and resource agencies throughout project development.

Conclusion

The Mississippi–Missouri Confluence is a landscape of exceptional ecological, hydrologic, recreational, and cultural importance. It has been shaped by generations of public investment, private stewardship, and conservation leadership. The regional maps, floodplain photography, documented wildlife observations, routing analyses, and engineering considerations presented throughout this assessment—and compiled in Appendix A—demonstrate that portions of the proposed project intersect an actively functioning floodplain supporting significant natural resources.

This report does not advocate against modern electric transmission infrastructure. Instead, it advocates for careful planning, rigorous environmental review, and thoughtful route selection so that the objectives of the Eastern Missouri Grid Transformation Project can be achieved while preserving the ecological integrity of one of the Midwest's most important conservation landscapes.

The coalition respectfully submits this assessment in the spirit of collaboration and with the belief that reliable infrastructure and responsible environmental stewardship are complementary public objectives that can—and should—be achieved together.