

# Public Perspectives 5

This chapter is intended to communicate the general public's perspectives and perceptions of the UMRS and the EMP. Included in this chapter are a summary of the public's participation in the EMP to date and the results of a recent major public survey on river-related issues and management options.

Coordination with the public through the first 10 years of this program has been accomplished primarily via public meetings for HREPs, distribution of project planning and implementation documents, and presentations on the program made at various forums. More public outreach will be necessary in the future as efforts to refine and quantify long-term ecological goals and objectives are undertaken.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

### **I General**

The working partnership that has formed in conjunction with the implementation of the EMP includes various government agencies, non-governmental interest groups, and members of the general public. This partnership has been crucial to successful interagency coordination. Public outreach has occurred through multiple mechanisms, including public meetings (both project-specific and more general) and presentations. Fact sheets, program updates, web sites, and videos have been developed and disseminated by the Corps of Engineers, the USGS, and other EMP partners.

### **I Corps District Efforts**

For each HREP, the responsible Corps of Engineers District prepared a Definite Project Report (DPR), which includes an Environmental Assessment, requiring public review. The DPR distribution list includes Congressional representatives; Federal,

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State, and local agencies; special interest groups; organizations; various media outlets; local post offices; local libraries; and individual citizens. HREP public meetings are often included at various project development stages and during the DPR review period. The typical format at the meetings is a summary and update of the EMP and a discussion of the specific features of the proposed HREP. The public provides input concerning the problems in the area, potential solutions, and the proposed project. In the St. Paul District, more than 40 public meetings have been held in conjunction with HREPs since the EMP began. The participating natural resource agencies (USFWS and State DNRs) are actively involved in the meetings. Attendance at the meetings is normally less than 50 people, but this number has been exceeded occasionally when significant issues exist. The typical public response is support for the proposed project and the general desire to see habitat improvements accomplished at a faster rate. A frequent statement heard is “let’s do more of this.” Since the meetings focus on specific HREPs, changes in HREP implementation can result from the meetings.

There have been several instances where suggestions from the public have prompted project modifications that better address the habitat improvement objectives, as explained in Chapter 4.



**Public meeting for Pool 8 Islands, Phase II Habitat Project.**

District staff members also speak to organizations, local clubs, public officials at all levels, conferences, and other special interest groups. These presentations can

include EMP displays, fact sheets, and status sheets, and frequently result in newspaper, television and/or radio coverage. An informational meeting held in Lansing, Iowa, in 1993, provided a general update of the EMP and was well received. The public response to learning about EMP has been favorable. Information about the EMP and HREPs is also provided via the District Internet-accessible web sites.

### **I EMTC Efforts**

More than 250 scientific and technical reports, program summaries, newsletters, and Project Status Reports have been produced since the EMP began. These publications are sent to program partners, decision-makers, and other interested parties to keep them informed about EMTC activities. The River Almanac, an information-sharing bulletin published periodically by the EMTC, provides program information to approximately 2,000 subscribers. The EMTC maintains a web site where LTRMP material can be accessed. The site is visited an average of 80,000 times per month, and more than 10,000 files are available for downloading.

A 17-minute video depicting LTRMP and HREP activities was produced in 1992, with almost 200 copies now distributed. The video has been shown more than 2,500 times to EMP partners, school groups, civic organizations, and the general public. The EMTC and the LTRMP field stations provide fact sheets and EMP brochures to visitors, tour groups, and other individuals who want information about the LTRMP.

To help explain program activities and findings, LTRMP staff give more than 50 papers and poster presentations a year and average 150 other outreach activities a year, such as professional conferences, demonstrations to students, media interviews, and responses to requests for data and publications. A large display is used at conferences, fairs, open houses, and public meetings to provide an overview of the LTRMP. Every year, the staff also conducts four week-long training sessions on Geographic Information Systems and up to 40

informal seminars on computer and information technology.

### **I Other EMP Partner Efforts**

The USFWS has been extremely active in promoting HREP activities and disseminating information to the public. Refuge personnel meet with local groups and individuals on a regular basis to give project and program updates, answer questions, and provide educational experiences. USFWS personnel are active participants at public meetings for HREPs, give tours of the projects to local interests, conduct media days, and serve as a local contact for public inquiries on a daily basis. The USFWS has found significant public interest in EMP activities.



**Group being briefed about habitat project in the field.**

The State natural resource agencies actively participate in the development of HREPs and the associated public coordination efforts. Some states have gone beyond these efforts. For example, the State of Wisconsin has developed brochures and displays and made numerous presentations to local groups. All of the states have worked with their Congressional delegations to promote and support the EMP.

Other organizations, such as the Minnesota-Wisconsin Boundary Area Commission and American Rivers, have printed articles about the EMP in periodical publications. These organizations have mailing lists that reach thousands of private citizens.

## **RIVER RESOURCE VALUES AND EXPECTATIONS**

The human dimension is an important, yet often overlooked, aspect of river ecosystem planning and analysis. However, one of the important missions of the LTRMP is to provide decision-makers with information to maintain the UMRS as a viable large-river ecosystem, given its multiple-use character. Within the context of this mission, a survey of the general public was conducted to assay river resource values and expectations. The survey supplements information gathered through the public involvement process by covering a broader range of river issues and by capturing viewpoints representative of the full public, rather than only those who participate more actively in the EMP.

The survey was developed by the EMTC and accomplished as part of the LTRMP.<sup>1</sup> The survey consisted of interviews with 2,500 randomly selected individuals residing in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin. The interviews were conducted by telephone between September 7 and October 24, 1996, by Survey Center Marketing Research of Chicago under government contract. The survey sample of 2,500 was divided to include 500 interviews per state; it was further divided to distinguish between interviews held with residents of counties bordering the navigable portions of the river system (300 per state) and with residents of each state's remaining counties (200 per state). The survey response rate was 60% and the results are considered accurate to +/-2%.

Results (for all respondents combined) showed that citizens value and appreciate the river system in complex ways, and have diverse opinions about how the river system should be managed in the future. Water quality and pollution were overwhelmingly the biggest concerns held by citizens. Potential management actions related to these

<sup>1</sup> The State of Missouri provided \$5,000 in direct support of this project. The St. Paul District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers administered the contract.

issues received the strongest support. Efforts to improve and increase habitat and the aesthetic quality of the river ranked next highest, followed by flood protection measures.



**Tow and backwaters of Pool 10.**

## **I People Value the River**

Respondents value the river system for a wide variety of reasons. There was virtually unanimous agreement (99%) that it is important to take care of the river system so that we can pass it along to future generations for their enjoyment. There also was a high level of agreement (over 80% for most indicators) that the river is important for environmental, commercial and economic, recreational, historical, and aesthetic reasons. Only 28% of the respondents stated that the river has no particular importance to them personally (see Figure 5-1).

## **I Environmental Considerations Are People's Biggest Concerns**

Water quality and pollution are overwhelmingly the biggest concerns of citizens. When asked to identify the most important problem on the stretch of the river with which they were most familiar, three-quarters of respondents who had an opinion mentioned a water quality issue. Flooding issues were the only other category to be mentioned by more than 10% of the respondents with an opinion.

## **I Environmental Management Actions Most Strongly Supported**

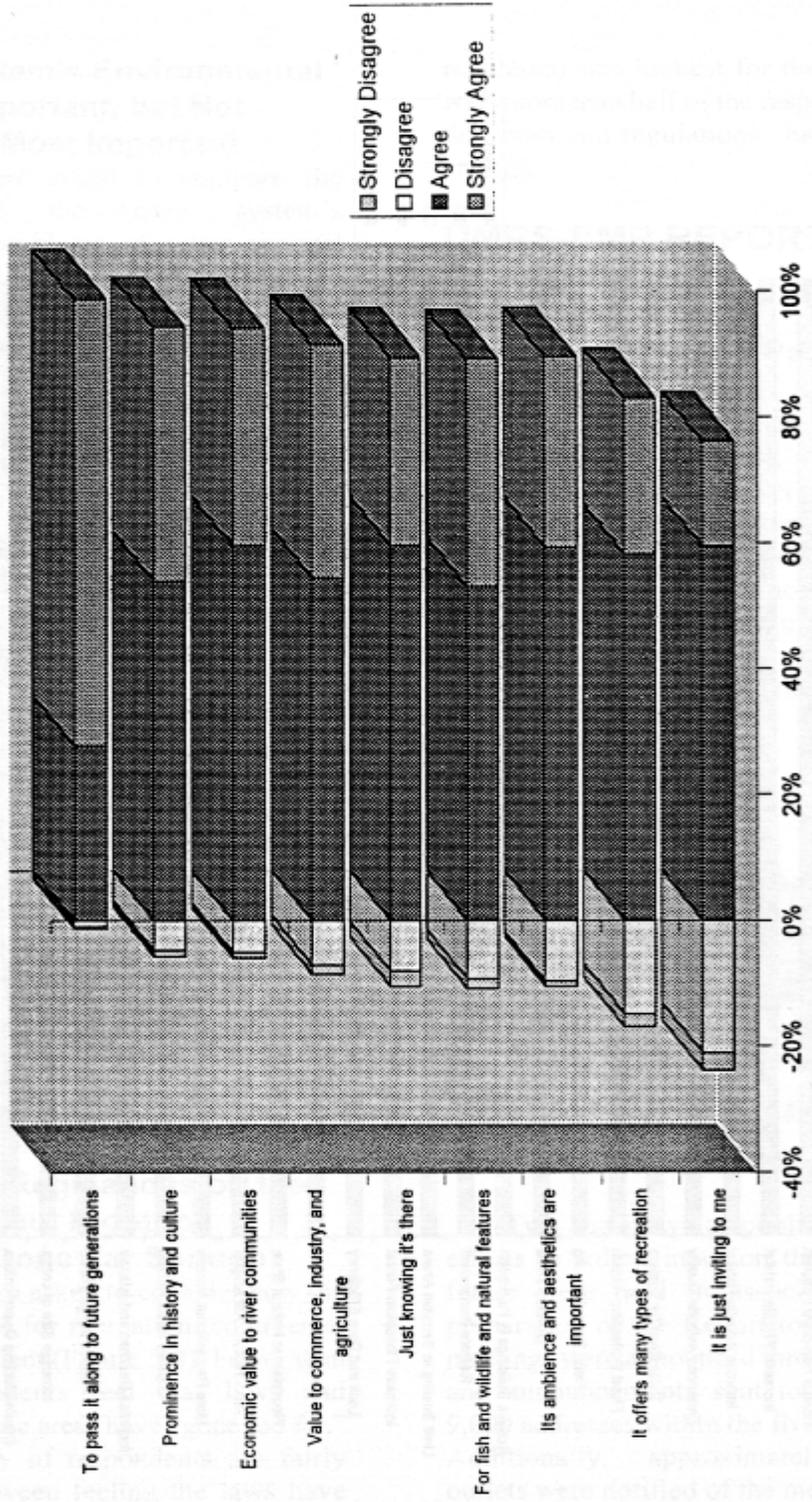
Respondents were asked to identify their level of support for various river management actions using a five-point scale ranging from 1=no support through 5=strong support (see Figure 5-2).

Efforts to improve water quality and reduce pollution received the strongest support, with more than half of all respondents indicating strong support, and less than 5% indicating no support. Efforts to improve and increase habitat and the aesthetic quality of the river system ranked next highest, and so on.

The lowest overall support was indicated for efforts to reduce barge traffic, increase the size of the locks, remove the locks and dams, and create more hunting opportunities. For example, efforts to remove the locks and dams were strongly supported by only 15% of the respondents, and were not supported at all by 30% of the respondents.

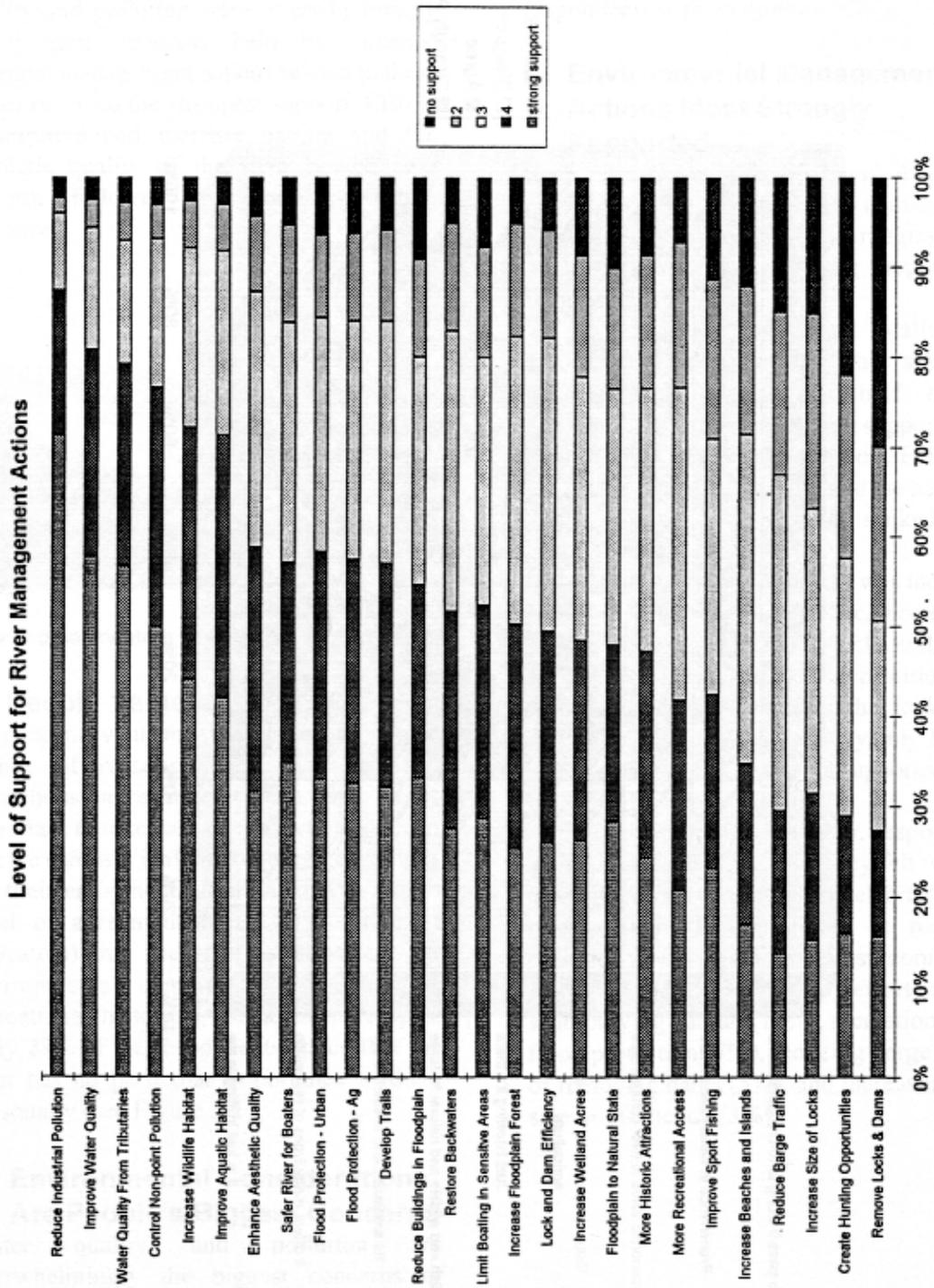
As an additional indicator, respondents were asked to identify what they felt was the most important management effort for the river system. Efforts aimed at reducing pollution were again the most commonly identified (62%), followed by efforts related to improving habitat (15%), recreation (9%), flood protection (7%), reducing barge traffic or removing dams (5%), and increasing lock size or efficiency (3%).

The River is Important to Me For...



The reasons are listed in order of highest mean score, from top to bottom, on the figure.

Figure 5-1. Survey Results on why the river is important.



Efforts are listed in order of strongest to weakest support (based on mean score), starting from the top of the figure.

Figure 5.2. Survey results on level of support for river management actions.

### **I River System's Environmental Issues Important, but Not Society's Most Important**

Respondents were asked to compare the importance of the river system's environmental problems to other societal problems (see Figure 5-3). Compared to social problems, 19% felt river environmental issues were among the most important problems, 54% considered them important but not the most important, and 27% considered them among the least important problems or not important at all. River environmental issues were considered slightly more important compared to economic problems (24% among the most important, 54% important but not among the most important, and 22% among the least important or not important at all), and compared to other environmental problems (31% among the most important, 52% important, 17% among the least important or not important at all).

When it is impossible to find a reasonable compromise between economic development and environmental protection, 75% of respondents believe environmental protection is usually more important, and 20% believe economic development is more important. National data suggest that most people believe environmental protection and economic development can be achieved together.<sup>2</sup>

### **I Laws and Regulations on the River: "About Right" or "Haven't Gone Far Enough"**

Respondents were asked to consider how the river is regulated for recreation, commerce, and the environment (Figure 5-4). Fewer than 10% of respondents feel that laws and regulations in these areas have "gone too far," and the majority of respondents are fairly evenly split between feeling the laws have "struck about the right balance" or "haven't gone far enough." Support for stronger

regulation was highest for the environment, with more than half of the respondents feeling that laws and regulations "haven't gone far enough."

## **UMRS-EMP REPORT TO CONGRESS**

### **I Formulation and Public Outreach**

Early on in the development of the UMRS-EMP Report to Congress, multiple report formulation meetings were held. These meetings included participants from the Federal and State resource management agencies and several non-governmental organizations. These formulation meetings established the report format, outline, and content expectations and initiated the public involvement process.



**Report to Congress formulation workshop.**

Two basin-wide public involvement efforts to solicit input on the EMP and its future were held in association with the preparation of the Report to Congress. The meetings were announced through newsletters and announcements sent to approximately 9,000 addresses within the five UMRS States. Additionally, approximately 800 media outlets were notified of the meetings through press releases. The media coverage of the meetings reached thousands of members of the public.

<sup>2</sup> "From Anxiety Toward Action: A Status Report on Conservation in 1994." The Times Mirror Magazine's National Environmental Forum Survey, June 1994.

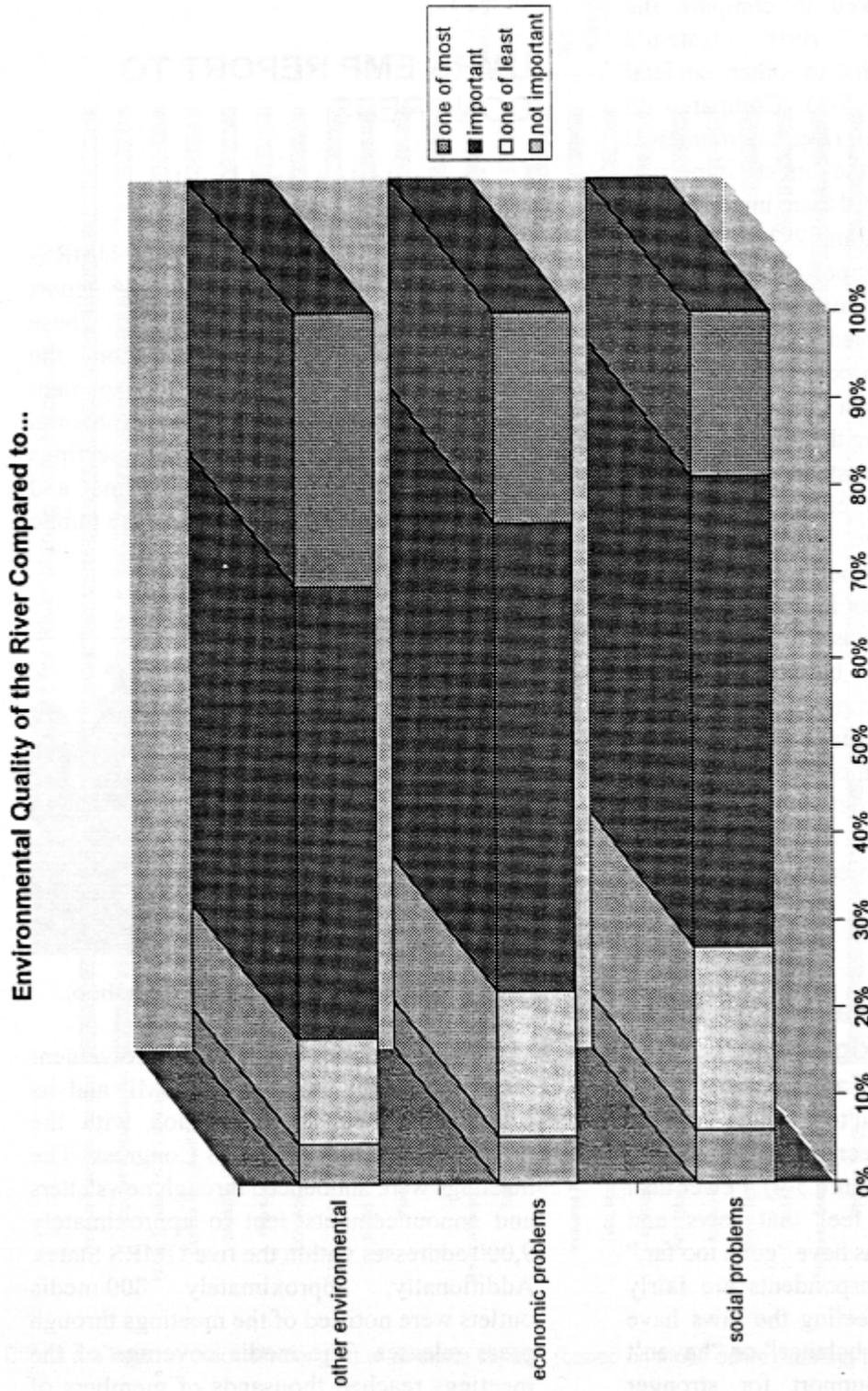


Figure 5-3. Survey results comparing environmental quality of the river to other societal problems.

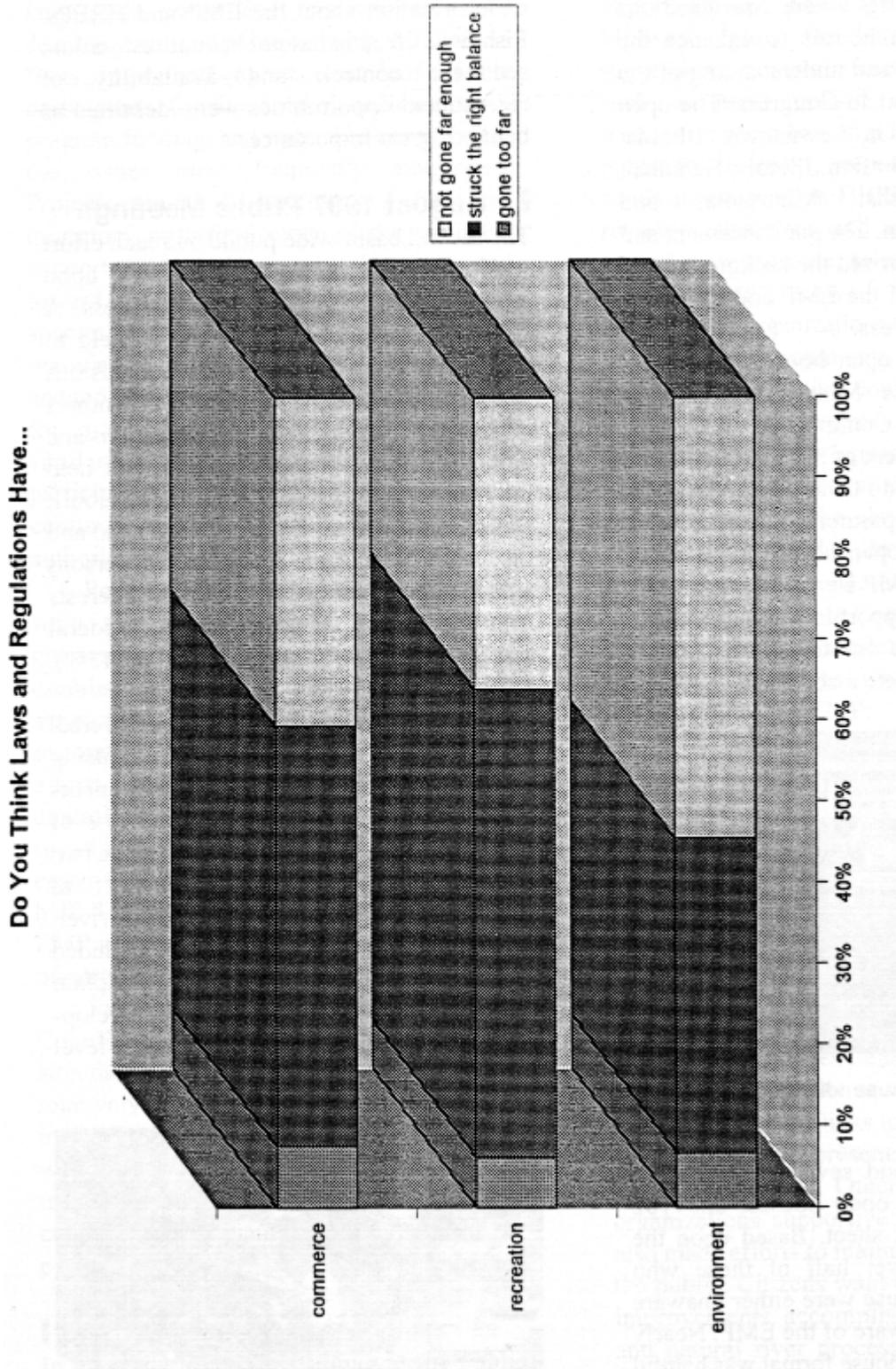


Figure 5-4. Survey results concerning laws and regulations on the river.

## I Spring 1997 Open Houses

The first series of meetings was held in April 1997. The meetings were designed as informational open houses to enhance the public's awareness and understanding of the EMP and the Report to Congress. The open houses were held in Lewistown, Illinois; Bettendorf, Iowa; Grafton, Illinois; Hannibal, Missouri; Wabasha, Minnesota; and Onalaska, Wisconsin. The announcement and news release summarized the background and accomplishments of the EMP and discussed the Report to Congress.

An additional open house, hosted and coordinated by the Minnesota-Wisconsin Boundary Area Commission and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, was held in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, on May 1, 1997. The partnering agencies also were present. The open houses emphasized the HREP and LTRMP elements of the EMP. The public had the opportunity to talk to EMP team members on a one-to-one basis, view displays, and complete a comment sheet.



**UMRS-EMP open house display and public outreach efforts.**

One hundred and seventy-five people attended the seven open houses, and 102 returned a comment sheet. Based upon the comment sheets, over half of those who attended an open house were either unaware or only somewhat aware of the EMP. Nearly all felt that the open house format was helpful to them in learning about the program, and that they had a better understanding of the EMP after attending an open house. A common theme among the written responses at the open houses was a strong desire for

greater public involvement and dissemination of information about the EMP and HREPs. Fish, wildlife, and natural habitat restoration; sediment control; and availability of recreational opportunities were identified as being of great importance.

## I August 1997 Public Meetings

The second basin-wide public outreach effort was undertaken during August 1997, upon release of the draft Report to Congress. A series of five public meetings was held to present the report's preliminary conclusions and recommendations to interested members of the public, and to solicit their reactions and opinions on these issues. Meetings were held in Peoria, Illinois; St. Louis, Missouri; Davenport, Iowa; Red Wing, Minnesota; and La Crosse, Wisconsin. A total of 182 persons attended the meetings, representing interests from environmental groups (26%), Federal and State agencies (20%), agriculture (13%), and recreation (10%).

Public input was gathered through verbal comments and written worksheets, focusing on both the HREP and LTRMP components of the EMP. Participants identified loss of habitat diversity and water quality as the two highest priority issues with respect to improving the "ecological health" of the river. Other high priority issues identified included loss of floodplain wetlands; floodplain confinement, encroachment, and development; sediment delivery; water level fluctuation; and shoreline erosion.



**Public meeting participants completing worksheets.**

Projects featuring bank stabilization,

flow control, upland sediment control, and large-scale water level management were deemed most important, being viewed as “very important” by at least half of the participants. Erosion control, sedimentation, program funding, and watershed control were the issues most frequently mentioned. Projects aimed at improving habitat for migratory waterfowl received the strongest support (71%), along with those targeted toward game fish (54%), and endangered species (40%). Funding for habitat projects was viewed as too low by half of participants, and too high by 1 out of 10. The funding level for monitoring and research was judged similarly. More than three-quarters of participants felt the EMP should be a continual program, instead of having a fixed authorization period.

Potential future actions for the EMP were also considered. More than three-quarters of participants were in favor of establishing a systemic habitat needs assessment to help guide future habitat restoration, protection, and enhancement efforts. Including small upland sediment control projects in the EMP was favored by two-thirds of participants, and including land easements or acquisitions was favored by half. The level of public involvement in the EMP was judged to be too low by two-thirds of participants, and about right by the rest.

Participants at the September 1997 EMP Coordinating Committee meeting felt that attendance at the public meetings was relatively low, but noted that it was probably indicative of the public’s general satisfaction with the EMP (high turnouts have traditionally occurred when people were concerned or unhappy with a program or project).

### **I Written Responses**

In addition to the verbal input at the public meetings, 33 letters were received from individuals and non-governmental organizations in response to the distribution of the draft Report to Congress. About 90% of the letters specifically mentioned support of the EMP. Many of the letters stressed the importance and value of the river to the

Midwest region. The letters also included suggestions on ways to improve the program, such as more upland sediment control features; more urban area HREPs; increased public involvement; preparation of a habitat needs assessment; an HREP-specific science review committee; and additional use of natural river processes to rehabilitate habitat. All 14 letters received from government agencies and organizations were supportive of the EMP. Their comments focused primarily on improvements that could be made to the draft Report to Congress. The letters also suggested various program modifications to improve the EMP. These suggestions played a major role in the development of the “Conclusions and Proposed Program Implementation Modifications” and “Recommendations to Congress” chapters of this report. None of the letters in response to the draft Report to Congress advocated termination of the EMP.

## **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Each Corps of Engineers District has included public involvement as part of its normal planning process for HREPs and has made special efforts to solicit public input and provide information when appropriate. The EMTC has also been sensitive to the public desire for information and has structured the LTRMP to provide links to the public through publications, staff presentations, and Internet communications. Other agencies and organizations supportive of the EMP have also made efforts to maintain a dialogue with the public. Citizens want to see more habitat improvements accomplished using HREPs and natural river processes. Most feel that existing funding levels are too low for habitat projects, monitoring, and research.

The results from a survey of the public values and expectations related to the UMRS show that citizens value and appreciate the river system and support its preservation for the enjoyment of future generations. They realize the importance of the river for multiple

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uses, but are especially concerned about its environmental health and recognize the need for environmental laws and regulations to properly manage the river system.

People who attended the public meetings for the Report to Congress feel that a habitat needs assessment is needed to adequately

manage the resources of the river system. The public feels an “ownership” of the UMRS and is concerned about actions taken and how they affect the health and well-being of the system. They also feel it is important to keep the public involved by expanding the level of public involvement activities in the EMP.