



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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MWRD position regarding the Great Lakes Commission report on watershed separation

The Great Lakes Commission published its report “Restoring the Natural Divide” yesterday, proposing a permanent separation of the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins in the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS). The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) is neutral on the issue of watershed separation. The MWRD’s mission is to improve water quality and prevent flooding. We support any scenario that improves water quality and decreases the likelihood of flooding. However, we cannot support any scenario that compromises water quality and/or increases the likelihood of flooding.

The MWRD is the expert on the CAWS, drawing from a wealth of information on the operation and working of the systems. We have willingly offered our expertise, knowledge, and support to those examining how to control invasive species related to the CAWS. We will continue to work to ensure that the protection of Lake Michigan, the CAWS, and the residents of Cook County remain a primary component of any solution.

The Great Lakes Commission included key stakeholders, including the MWRD, to participate in the study. The group met several times with organizations to review the many issues involved with watershed separation and receive feedback and concerns. The Commission looked at absolute separation at three different points in the Chicago area: at the lakefront control structures, at midpoints in the system, and at a single separation point below the confluence of the Calumet-Sag Channel and Sanitary and Ship Canal.

There are major challenges to any undertaking of this magnitude, most significantly flood prevention, water quality, transportation and cost. Flooding is the number one issue the Chicago region is facing based on recent changes in weather trends. There can be no decrease in flood protection of any magnitude. In addition, water quality cannot be compromised in any solution that would be implemented.

The report takes a macro view of separation. Detailed technical information has not been made available until now. This information will need to be studied and reviewed before any conclusions can be drawn. The MWRD looks forward to reviewing the report in detail to understand watershed separation impacts on flood mitigation, water quality and affordability.

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