

12/14/2021

**Mississippi River Network (MRN) Public Comment
December 14, 2021
Gulf Hypoxia Task Force Public Meeting**

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Maisah Khan. I am the Policy Director at the Mississippi River Network¹, I am based out of St. Louis, MO. Thank you to the task force, state, and federal agencies involved in making this meeting possible and providing this opportunity for public comment. My comments today center around the need for more robust public engagement by the Task Force, and a new opportunity for funding nutrient reduction strategies called the Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative (or MRRRI).²

My organization the Mississippi River Network (MRN) is a coalition of nearly 60 organizations from all 10 mainstem River states (from the Headwaters in Minnesota to the Gulf) as well as national organizations.

MRN is dedicated to protecting the land, water, wildlife, and people of our Mississippi River. MRN implements the only national public program of its kind for our River, called *1 Mississippi* which is designed to educate, engage, and inspire people to take action to protect the River.³

In the past, my organization has prepared state-specific comment letters for each of the 10 mainstem states that participate in the Task Force. This year, we encouraged our River Citizens and grassroots supporters to attend and consider making a public comment. I'm proud of our grassroots supporters who are attending today, a few who will make a public comment for the first time.

This annual public meeting is the only opportunity that the public, non-profit organizations, and other stakeholders get to engage the Task Force as a whole – and we think the Task Force can do much better to encourage and enable robust public participation in a meeting like this.

I echo the concerns raised about the fact that despite incremental progress in reduction strategies and the increased adoption of innovative conservation practices, we are nowhere near the interim target of reducing nitrogen and phosphorus loading by 20 percent by 2025. We can no longer keep doing the same thing and expecting different results. It's also hard to see the forest for the trees when the Task Force's overarching goals are not front and center in meetings like this.

We can all agree that we need more money to support reductions. Even in states with access to funding– like the “Park, Soils, and Water Sales Tax” we have here in MO – our state conservation programs are regularly oversubscribed.

At MRN, we're excited about the opportunity to support the Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative (or MRRRI). This new initiative would create a dedicated geographic program focused on the health of the Mississippi River and could include significant funds for voluntary grant and partnership-based projects that reduce nutrient pollution.

We're here to echo all those presenters and commenters here today who are urging increased action, coordination, and resources to states to ramp up efforts.

¹ More information about MRN at <https://mississippiriver.org>

² Learn more about MRRRI (H.R. 4202) at <https://mississippiriver.org/mrrri/>

³ More information about MRN's *1 Mississippi* program at <https://1mississippi.org/>

12/14/2021

Thank you.

Maisah Khan

Policy Director, Mississippi River Network

she/her/hers

mkhan@1mississippi.org