United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 24, 2008

The Honorable Byron L. Dorgan
Chairman
Energy and Water Development
Appropriations Subcommittee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Pete V. Domenici
Ranking Member
Energy and Water Development
Appropriations Subcommittee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Dorgan and Ranking Member Domenici:

We are writing to respectfully request that you appropriate funding in the Fiscal Year 2009 to initiate studies of the contemporary problems and needs of the mainstem of the Missouri River Basin. These studies will allow the Army Corps of Engineers to objectively reevaluate the existing Missouri River Mainstem Reservoir System to determine if the physical, economic, or environmental conditions have changed since the project's completion and whether the Congressionally authorized purposes should be updated to best meet the contemporary needs of the basin.

The Missouri River Mainstem Reservoir System is currently operated in accordance with the 1944 Flood Control Act (FCA) for various authorized purposes including flood control, water supply, irrigation, hydropower, navigation, recreation, and fish and wildlife. However, in the 64 years that have passed since the 1944 FCA was enacted, the importance to the nation of the various authorized purposes have changed. For example, municipal and industrial water supply and recreation have become increasingly important as the population has grown. Furthermore, a multi-year drought has resulted in low reservoir levels that are significantly hindering water uses throughout the river system.

The Missouri River is vital to the central United States, and to the one-sixth of the North American continent that it drains. It is also one of the country's most engineered river systems with six large dams that can store up to 73 million acre-feet of water in the reservoirs. At their confluence, the Missouri nearly doubles the volume of the Mississippi, accounting for 45 percent of the flow in normal times and as much as 70 percent of the flow during droughts. Therefore, an objective study is needed to ensure that this river system is maintained and operated in the most effective manner possible.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We recognize that there are many competing priorities facing your Subcommittee, but we believe that a reevaluation of the problems and needs of the mainstem of the Missouri River Basin is warranted. In the

intervening 64 years since the project was authorized by Congress conditions in the basin and the world have changed markedly. A study of the contemporary needs of the basin is the most cost-effective way to inform Congress of what changes, if any, should be made to the authorized project purposes or operations of the Missouri River Mainstem Reservoir System.

Sincerely,

Jon Tester

Tim Johnson

John Thune

Max Baucus

Kent Conrad