United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 8, 2011

John R. McMahon
Brigadier General, US Army
Division Commander
Corps of Engineers, Northwestern Division
Post Office Box 2870
1125 NW Couch Street, Suite 500
Portland, Oregon 97208-2870

Dear Brigadier General McMahon:

As the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers finalizes the 2011-2012 Annual Operating Plan for the Missouri River, we are encouraged that the concerns of constituents and stakeholders up and down the river have been heard and that the Corps will take an aggressive approach on winter and spring releases. We are also encouraged that you are focusing on enhancing communication at every level so all levels of government and individuals can be informed and better prepared in the future.

However, the record flooding on the Missouri River this year leaves many damaged levees and other infrastructure along the river that will not be repaired or only partially repaired in time for possible high water flows next year. Many thousands of acres of farmland that also impacts communities will likely only have 25 year flood protection at best.

For these reasons, the Corps should not only consider historical patterns and weather predictions for snow pack and rain, but also the weakened level of flood protection many of our constituents face. Therefore, it is crucial that water releases prior to March 1, 2012 be well above what would otherwise be the case without the reality of damaged levees. The Corps should do all that it can to maximize the reservoir reserves by March 1 without significantly increasing the chances of flooding or having the river run at a level that seriously impedes the repair of levees and other flood structures. In the case that high precipitation levels occur in the coming year, there will be a considerable need for above normal reservoir capacity. In addition, releases should stay high under the same criteria after March 1 to maintain the higher than normal reserve capacity.

Thank you for your prompt consideration of these important matters. We look forward to continuing to work with the Corps on recovery and further operations on the Missouri River.

Sincerely,

Senator Chuck Grassley

Senator Tom Harkin

Senator Claire McCaskill

Senator Roy Blunt

Senator Ben Nelson

Senator Mike Johanns

Senator Kent Conrad

Senator John Hoeven

Senator Tim Johnson

Senator John Thune