

**Project will benefit Southeast Missouri**

I would like to respond to Mark Dunlap's Dec. 1 letter, "Wetlands policy." He states that the Army Corps of Engineers is supporting a project in southeast Missouri that would "drain more than 18,000 acres of the very same wetlands that the EPA is seeking to restore."

This figure is patently incorrect, as is the assertion that we will be draining wetlands.

In fact, the total area of the project is 18,000 acres. The corps mitigation plans - developed in partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency - actually will more than double the amount of forested wetlands in the project area, creating more than 8,000 acres of bottomland hardwoods.

Dunlap also asserts that the St. Johns Bayou-New Madrid Floodway project is "an \$80 million boondoggle that will forever alter the most significant expanse of wetlands in our state's Bootheel region."

The citizens of the Bootheel communities of East Prairie and Pinhook do not consider keeping floodwaters out of their homes and businesses a boondoggle. Further, the alterations to this region's wetlands include 9,000 acres of reforestation or improvements and increased connectivity between the river and floodway during fish-spawning season.

An analysis performed by an interagency team indicates that all wildlife resources will be more than adequately compensated by an aggressive mitigation plan.

The bottom line is, federal, state and local agencies have worked in concert to develop a project that will leave the floodway area and its citizens better off economically and environmentally.

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