

Heron Pond Shorebird Habitat Enhancement Project Dedication Ceremony

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Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary
St. Charles, Missouri

Opening Remarks provided by:

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Sustaining our natural aquatic ecosystems like the Mississippi River is not just a conversation for scientists and engineers – it really needs to involve all of us. A place like the Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary is not just a destination for birds, its open space is also a destination for people – a place and an opportunity for each of us to compatibly reconnect with the natural world around us.

This work that we are dedicating here today is important, not only in its value for shorebirds but also in its outreach value. This place is a great living classroom where we raise important awareness about the needs of migratory birds and a national environmental treasure, the Mississippi River. Special open spaces like this are great teaching places where we can call attention to the importance of our nation's water resources, they are gateways to that resource, and they help people connect the dots so they better understand natural systems overall.

Watershed literacy is critically important in the 21st century. Stewardship of our nation's water supply is something of great social relevance – it matters to all of us, and sustaining its quality and availability is a matter of national security.

By creating a destination for birds and humans, we not only improve our local quality of life, we also diversify and strengthen the local economy by growing a nature-based tourism industry. Helping local waterside communities better appreciate the value of the natural capital of this river and how to harvest it sustainably will reposition communities with a greater stake in the river's future.

The collaboration here between Audubon and the U.S. Corps of Engineers and the inclusive nature of how these two organizations have brought others together to recognize and help build value into this special place, demonstrates the power of social capital and collaboration.

The collaborative process that is going on here needs to be recognized and nurtured because it is a model of cooperation for all of us. As we go forward and attempt to better integrate water resource management strategies across regions and across natural systems, we are going to find that local communities and local actions like this add system value. I hope economists and decision makers begin to better appreciate the power of grassroots collaboration in getting system work at all levels started and sustained.

It is difficult to describe and bottle successful collaboration as a process that can be replicated everywhere. Successful collaboration is built around shared values and a shared vision. In the twenty years the Corps and Audubon have collaborated at this site, their successes have been marked by a set of shared values and a shared commitment to make a lasting difference.

The St. Louis Audubon Society has been a key partner to the Corps of Engineers here at the Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary from the very beginning. I particularly want to call out the singular contribution that Paul Bauer has made as a citizen advocate for this place, this system, and for making a difference. I believe I can speak for everyone that has worked here on the Confluence when I say that Paul is living proof that one person's vision and commitment can drive change and make a difference. Paul Bauer is not a water resource user. Paul Bauer is a water resource steward.

Ultimately, if we are going to sustain our nation's water resources, it is going to take more than engineers and scientists, more than regulations and national policy, it is going to take each of us moving from being simply water users to water stewards.

Places like Riverlands can be great platforms for fostering alignment of purpose among managing agencies and non-government organizations like Audubon. Another great project on the horizon, the proposed Audubon Nature Center here at Riverlands, when realized, will make a tremendous contribution further connecting visitors with this river landscape and the wonderful birdlife that finds refuge at this mid-migration stopover. The center will be a great addition to the Confluence and I commend Audubon and the Corps for their vision in realizing its potential and their collaborative efforts to see it completed.

On the behalf of all of us, I salute the folks here at Rivers Project for their collaborative spirit and the folks at Audubon and Paul Bauer for "getting it," for recognizing the opportunity of this place, for stepping up and leading by example, and for getting results. It is my hope that over time more of us will recognize the power of this place with its diverse array of water infrastructure and its wonderful natural river landscape as a regional water messaging hub where water resource practitioners can engage our nation's leadership and all of you in a conversation about what can happen when everyone has a place at the table.

Thank You.