

THE TRIBUNE'S VIEW

Taming the river

By [HENRY J. WATERS III](#)

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Once upon a time the Missouri River ran free, providing natural habitat for indigenous species and a vital avenue for waterborne transportation. Then mankind got busy taming the river for other uses. Dams were built upstream to impound water for drinking and recreation. Below, levees and wing dams controlled the flow, protecting against flooding and erosion and making straighter channels for navigation. Next thing we knew, the natural functions of the mighty river were lost. As downstream builders sought to manage the river for agriculture and transport, upstream managers, who had first crack at the water, held it in giant lakes for their own use. Ever since, downstreamers have pushed for rules forcing the dam builders to open their floodgates while natural species suffered as humans messed with their habitats.

Enter the Army Corps of Engineers, the hapless agency years ago given the impossible task of satisfying irreconcilable differences so many generations in the making. Finally the corps came up with a plan for water management, but after a few years complaining persists and Congress has commissioned a \$25 million study. Nobody, including the group conducting the study, thinks it is likely to bring mutual happiness. Apparently Congress had to do *something*, so we shall have another study.

Meanwhile the lower river barge industry scrapes bottom and the pallid sturgeon looks harder to find enticing places for courtship. People in the Dakota neighborhood grouse because water is being sent downstream to satisfy a dying transport industry, and the sturgeon might not be that much better off.

Stand by for the 2010 version of the River War, coming soon.

HJW III

The game of life is a game of boomerangs. Our thoughts, deeds and words return to us

sooner or later, with astonishing accuracy.

— FLORENCE SHINN (1871-1940), WRITER



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ColumbiaCharacter says...

The Missouri River was never suitable for barge traffic.

Billions of public funds have been spent trying to create a navigable waterway.

Nature will eventually win. Return it to its natural condition and quit wasting taxpayer monies.

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