



Goals, Objectives, and Priorities

2024 - 2028

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Introduction

MICRA works to preserve, protect, restore, and enhance interjurisdictional fishery resources and aquatic habitats in the Mississippi River Basin (Basin) through cooperative assessment and management of the basin's aquatic resources. MICRA's member agencies developed a comprehensive Strategic Plan in 1991 and completed an Activity Prioritization of the Plan's 10 goals and 133 tasks in 1992.

The MICRA Executive Board established an Operational Plan for the 5-year period 2014-2018 to focus on a much smaller subset of priorities for the partnership to accomplish during the operational period through the work of member agency delegates, the Executive Board, and committees. This Operational Plan, which is updated every five years, is intended to be a guiding document that is timely and responsive to the current biological, social, and political issues that influence fishery resource management. As such, the Operational Plan is an adaptive document that will be updated as needed to remain relevant and provide for the most effective cooperative management of the fishery and aquatic resources in the basin.

MICRA developed 'A Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Mississippi River Basin Fisheries' (Joint Strategic Plan) in February 2021. Twenty-six of the twenty-eight MICRA member state agency Directors have signed a Memorandum of Acceptance of the Joint Strategic Plan. The Joint Strategic Plan is intended to serve as a foundational document for the proposed Mississippi River Basin Fishery Commission (Fishery Commission). Based on mission statements, the following common goal statement was developed to represent the shared intent of the MICRA member agencies regarding interjurisdictional fishery resources in the Basin:

Coordinate the conservation, development, and utilization of sustainable interjurisdictional fishery and aquatic resources in the Mississippi River Basin for the public through cooperative management among the responsible entities.

The Joint Strategic Plan identifies four key problem areas that must be addressed to comprehensively manage interjurisdictional fishery resources now and in the future and identifies broad strategies and strategic processes necessary to collaboratively resolve these complex issues.

Problem Areas

1. Aquatic Invasive Species
2. Inadequate Resources for Research and Management of Shared Fisheries

3. Habitat Loss and Degradation
4. Limited Public and Stakeholder Involvement and Support

Strategies

1. Ecosystem Management
2. Information Management and Sharing
3. Outreach and Communication
4. Consensus
5. Accountability

Accomplishing this shared goal statement would benefit from increased diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in human resources working on fisheries and aquatic resources and by providing opportunities for the public to become engaged in this effort.

MICRA drew heavily from its Joint Strategic Plan in the development of this Operational Plan for 2024-2028. However, the absence of a federal authorization and appropriations to form and support the proposed Fishery Commission constrains full implementation of the Joint Strategic Plan.

Goals and Objectives

GOALS

- I. Coordinate basin-wide management of interjurisdictional fishery resources and aquatic habitats among the responsible management entities. *[INTERNAL COMMUNICATION]*
- II. Increase awareness, support, and funding for basin-wide management of interjurisdictional fishery resources and aquatic habitats. *[EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION]*

OBJECTIVES

1. Coordinate implementation of interjurisdictional fishery and aquatic resource management programs throughout the basin. *[IJ FISH]*
2. Identify priority habitat restoration needs for the Mississippi River Basin, coordinate with national and regional aquatic habitat initiatives, and provide a forum for information and technical exchange. *[AQUATIC HABITAT]*
3. Coordinate prevention and control measures for Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) to ensure sustainable native aquatic ecosystems within the basin. *[AIS]*
4. Develop and implement a communication plan for disseminating information to target audiences. *[COMMUNICATION]*
5. Secure funding for long-term operational needs and implementation of basin-wide programs. *[FUNDING]*

Priorities

Objective 1: Coordinate implementation of interjurisdictional fishery and aquatic resource management programs.

MICRA Joint Strategic Plan Excerpt

Problem Area: Limited Public and Stakeholder Involvement and Support

Interjurisdictional management of shared fishery and aquatic resources throughout the basin would benefit from:

- Basin-wide plans that prioritize fishery management needs and identify mechanisms for the development of shared management objectives and collaborative implementation, data sharing, and evaluation of management actions.
- Improving communication, coordination, and collaboration among state and federal agencies and NGOs to identify shared priorities, interests, and opportunities to address significant problem areas affecting long-term management of self-sustaining interjurisdictional fishery resources in the basin.
- Promoting partnerships (working and funding) among governments, the public, and NGOs to promote economic and environmental security and stability along the Mississippi River and its tributaries.
- Effective non-technical communication resulting in increased public awareness and improved public perception of the economic, social, and cultural value of the basin's natural resources.
- Effective stakeholder involvement practices to identify public concerns and values, develop consensus among affected parties, and produce efficient and effective solutions through an open, inclusive process.

Priorities:

1. Identify and prioritize basin-wide resource management issues of concern in the Mississippi River Basin.
 - a) MICRA delegates meet every 3-5 years to review priorities and discuss emerging issues of concern within the basin.
 - b) Standing committees review priorities and discuss emerging issues of concern within the basin every 3-5 years. Committees will report to the Executive Board at least once annually on

progress of priorities identified in this document.

- c) Encourage and support the development of sub-basin management plans under the *Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Mississippi River Basin Fisheries*.
- d) Executive Board updates MICRA's priorities document every 5 years.

2. Use standing technical committees and temporary working groups as needed to provide for the development of coordinated strategies to address priority issues and identify basin-wide research needs to support conservation, management, and utilization of native interjurisdictional fishes and aquatic resources.

- a) Support continued efforts for coordinated basin-wide management of paddlefish and sturgeon species.
 - i. The Paddlefish and Sturgeon Committee will complete a basin-wide management framework for paddlefish.
 - ii. Develop or update sub-basin paddlefish management plans in support of the basin-wide paddlefish management framework.
 - iii. The Paddlefish and Sturgeon Committee will consider the need for coordination and management of a basin-wide tag database for paddlefish in support of the basin-wide paddlefish management framework and the sub-basin management plans, and provide recommendations to the Executive Board regarding the future of the database.
 - iv. The Paddlefish and Sturgeon Committee will provide the Executive Board with a recommendation and cost estimate for completing sensitivity analysis of the available paddlefish age and growth data from commercial harvest states to inform priority next steps and additional research needs.
 - v. The Paddlefish and Sturgeon Committee will develop a list of priority research needs to advance cooperative interjurisdictional management of paddlefish and sturgeon.
- b) Support and collaborate with the Freshwater Mollusk Conservation Society to enable native mussel conservation efforts that impacts or is impacted by interjurisdictional fisheries

in the Mississippi River Basin.

- i. The Freshwater Mollusk Conservation Society will be invited at least once per year to meet with the MICRA Executive Board to discuss native freshwater mussel priorities in the Mississippi River Basin.
3. Build consensus for compatible regulations and policies for priority interjurisdictional fishery and aquatic resources issues.
 - a) Encourage and facilitate law enforcement participation in the development of collaborative management and regulatory strategies to support conservation, management, and utilization of interjurisdictional fishes and aquatic resources, including to preventing the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species.
 - b) Work with USFWS and AFWA to host a facilitated workshop or meetings for biologists and law enforcement representatives from paddlefish and sturgeon commercial harvest states to determine the need for standardized methods for documenting and reporting harvest data, developing and maintaining basin-wide commercial harvest databases including roe harvest and roe buyers, and developing a system for tracking commercially harvested roe through final sale.
4. Determine the socio-economic value of fishery resources and related recreation in the Mississippi River Basin.
 - a) Work with USFWS to provide a written economic value report for the Mississippi River Basin, including an analysis by MICRA sub-basin boundaries, using 2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation data.
 - b) Work with USFWS to explore the possibility of developing a report that includes an estimated return on dollars invested to manage fishery resources in the Mississippi River Basin based on 2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation data. (Report similar to the USFWS 2011 publication 'Net Worth: The Economic Value of Fisheries Conservation' that focuses on contributions to the U.S. economy in terms of jobs created and conservation stimulated commerce.)

Objective 2: Identify priority habitat restoration needs for the Mississippi River Basin, coordinate with national and regional aquatic habitat initiatives, and provide a forum for information and technical exchange.

MICRA Joint Strategic Plan Excerpt

Problem Area: Habitat Loss and Degradation

Interjurisdictional management of shared fisheries habitat loss and degradation throughout the basin would benefit from the following actions:

- Strategically coordinating interstate and inter-agency actions to identify mutually beneficial (ecology, economics, human health, safety) solutions for addressing:
 - Watershed improvements to maximize benefit to interjurisdictional rivers and reservoirs,
 - Floodplain habitat improvements for interjurisdictional fishes,
 - Conflicting water uses that address interjurisdictional fish habitat needs.
- Effectively identifying the combination of measures needed to restore water quality and quantity in areas where it has the greatest impact on fish stocks and habitats.
- Coordinating actions to address past, present, and potential future sources of contamination (i.e., pharmaceuticals and plastics).

Priorities:

1. The Executive Board will identify and implement next steps for the MICRA Aquatic Habitat Action Plan completed in 2023.
2. Identify and support opportunities to establish regular information exchange, communication, and coordination between entities responsible for aquatic habitat management in the basin.
3. Create awareness of the needs and opportunities to increase and direct funding to implement priority habitat projects identified in the MICRA Aquatic Habitat Action Plan.

Objective 3: Coordinate prevention and control measures for Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) to ensure sustainable aquatic ecosystems within the basin.

MICRA Joint Strategic Plan Excerpt

Problem Area: Aquatic Invasive Species

Interjurisdictional management and control of aquatic invasive species throughout the basin would benefit from:

- Coordinated delivery of basin-wide, state-based invasive carp management and control actions, in partnership with relevant federal agencies, to achieve the goals and objectives of the national *Management and Control Plan for Bighead, Black, Grass, and Silver Carps in the United States*.
- Coordinated regulatory strategies and enforcement to prevent the introduction of new AIS, and the transportation and spread of existing AIS within the basin.
- Effective actions to minimize the risk of introduction of AIS from other watersheds via man-made (e.g., Great Lakes via the Chicago Area Waterway System) and natural connections.
- Coordinated planning, implementation, and evaluation of management and control actions to minimize the abundance of AIS introduced within the basin.
- Comprehensive monitoring and assessment programs to provide for the evaluation of AIS impacts on native species and ecosystems, and to inform the effective implementation of management and control actions within the basin.
- Execution of Mutual Aid and similar agreements to empower the basin states to work together to address a serious regional threat from AIS.
- Research and development of deterrents and control tools to contain and reduce the abundance of AIS in the basin.

Priorities:

1. Serve as an *ex officio* member of the national Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force.
2. Host, coordinate, and support activities of the Mississippi River Basin Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species, a regional advisory committee to the national Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force.

3. Support a standing technical committee on Aquatic Invasive Species for coordination of basin-wide efforts to prevent introductions, manage introduced populations, and develop recommendations regarding AIS policy concerns.
4. Seek Congressional support to strengthen the Injurious Wildlife provisions of the Lacey Act.
 - a) The Aquatic Invasive Species Committee will identify needs and provide recommendations to the Executive Board to promote streamlining of the Lacey Act Injurious Wildlife Listing process.
 - b) The Aquatic Invasive Species Committee will identify needs and provide recommendations to the Executive Board for establishment of an efficient federal screening process to evaluate risk of non-native species prior to importation, particularly species not already in trade.
 - c) The Aquatic Invasive Species Committee will identify needs and provide recommendations to the Executive Board for establishment of an efficient federal screening process for organisms in trade.
5. Promote development of consistent basin-wide regulatory approaches for the management of AIS.
 - a) The Executive Board will facilitate meetings and discussions with the states that allow stocking of diploid grass carp within the basin, as needed, to establish regulatory consistency for grass carp as recommended in the February 2015 MICRA Grass Carp Report.
 - b) The Mississippi River Basin Panel and Aquatic Invasive Species Committee will coordinate efforts to implement recommendations in the February 2015 MICRA Grass Carp Report.
 - c) The AIS committee will work to develop model baitfish regulations that can be used by states within the Mississippi River Basin to limit the movement of AIS and pathogens through the bait fish trade.
 - d) The AIS Committee will engage in and support national efforts to develop model regulations for Organisms in Trade.
6. Support efforts to prevent the exchange of AIS between the Mississippi River basin and connected watersheds such as the Great Lakes and

Mobile River basins.

- a) Raise awareness of the immediate need for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to initiate the scoping phase for a feasibility study to prevent the *two-way* transfer of AIS as the next step for the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study authorized by Congress in the Water Resources Development Act of 2007.
7. Support the Invasive Carp Advisory Committee for basin-wide coordination to develop collaborative advice and recommendations on the development, implementation, and assessment of management and control actions across the six sub-basin partnerships to promote a unified, collaborative strategy for the Mississippi River Basin.
 - a) In partnership with USFWS, coordinate the collaborative development of an annual Monitoring and Response Plan to identify highest priority management actions for invasive carps in the Mississippi River Basin.
 - b) Coordinate the collaborative development, prioritization, and submission of an annual basin-wide suite of priority project proposals to USFWS for federal funding assistance to implement sub-basin Invasive Carp Control Strategy Frameworks.
 - c) Develop recommendations for population assessment approach(es) to evaluate the change in abundance and/or distribution of invasive carp across the basin in response to management actions.
 - d) Develop recommendations for coordinating invasive carp removal programs on a basin-wide scale.
 8. Promote the development and support promulgation of consistent outreach materials and messages throughout the Mississippi River Basin to support AIS prevention, management, and control.
 - a) The Aquatic Invasive Species Committee will review and make recommendations for revising the MICRA AIS Action Plan so that it remains a relevant outreach tool.
 - b) Seek support from USFWS and other partners for collaborative sub-basin and basin-wide internal and external invasive carp communication needs.

Objective 4: Develop and implement a communication plan for disseminating information to target audiences.

Priorities:

1. Identify and implement an approach for developing a MICRA communications plan.
2. Continue to host and manage content on the MICRA website.
3. Engage in efforts to increase awareness and action of Congressional members to improve management of fishery and aquatic resources in the Mississippi River Basin.
4. Develop a 5-year report of activities, accomplishments, and remaining resource needs identified in the MICRA priorities document.
5. Host workshops and networking opportunities at national and regional professional meetings (e.g., Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference, SEAFWA, AFS Parent Society meetings) for MICRA member agency delegates, committee members, and partners.

Objective 5: Secure funding for long-term operational needs and implementation of basin-wide programs.

MICRA Joint Strategic Plan Excerpt

Problem Area: Inadequate Resources for Research and Management of Shared Fisheries

Interjurisdictional management of fishery and aquatic resources throughout the basin would benefit from:

- Increasing communication of the status of these fishes, habitat needs, harvest statistics, and barriers to effective management efforts.
- Identifying the research, management, and conservation actions necessary to maintain and recover species classified as threatened, endangered, or species of concern.
- Increasing coordination and funding support for research necessary to inform management activities and provide for improved management of interjurisdictional fishery resources.
- Promoting partnerships (working and funding) among governments, the public, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to manage shared fishery resources.
- Facilitating effective management strategies that allow movement of native fishes while deterring invasive species.
- Implementing coordinated efforts to standardize and compile agency harvest regulations for interjurisdictional fishery resources.

Priorities:

1. Pursue reliable, long-term funding sources and mechanisms for MICRA.
2. Work with MICRA member agencies, partner organizations, and stakeholder groups to pursue formation of a congressionally funded Mississippi River Basin Fishery Commission to facilitate cooperative management of interjurisdictional fishery and aquatic resources among the state, tribal, and federal management agencies; control AIS (e.g., invasive carps, mussels, and vegetation); and coordinate research to inform and evaluate fisheries management and AIS control actions.