

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
SMALL BUSINESS AND
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

March 2, 2018

R.D. James
Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20314-1000

Dear Assistant Secretary James,

I am writing to request a briefing on the 2018 Missouri River management plan and an update on the implementation of the Missouri River Snowpack and Drought Monitoring Program.

As you know, in 2011, due to large levels of snowfall in the Rocky Mountains and the Northern Plains, extensive flooding impacted tributaries and the mainstream Missouri River. This flooding caused more than \$2 billion in damage and thousands of people were forced to evacuate their homes. In many areas, the flooding and subsequent damage it caused continued for months. In my opinion, failure to appropriately respond in a timely fashion led to significant increase in flooding and damage.

Following the flood, a 2014 Government Accountability Office concluded that improving existing hydrological data and collecting additional soil moisture and plains snowpack data could assist the Corps in making future release decisions and improving long-term forecasting models.

In response to the lack of remote field condition information prior to the 2011 Missouri River Flood, Section 4003 of the 2014 Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA) authorized the Corps to coordinate with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric (NOAA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) to create a soil moisture and snowpack monitoring network in the Upper Missouri River Basin.

In 2016, the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act (PL 114-322) authorized the U.S. Army Corps to become the lead agency for implementing this program. However, it is my understanding that the Corps has not yet fully implemented this monitoring program.

Recent reports indicate that mountain snowpack to date is 129 percent of average above Fort Peck, and 135 of average from Fort Peck to Fort Garrison, with most

snowpack expected to accumulate in the following months. In the spring, this melting snowpack and the corresponding runoff can pose a significant flood risk to the Northern Plains states.

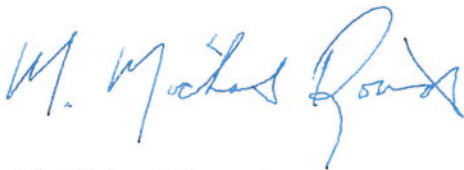
These snowpack levels so early in the season are concerning and in the following months it will be vital that the Corps carefully monitor these levels, properly manage winter and spring releases along the Missouri River and frequently and effectively communicate with the communities in the Missouri River basin.

Further, the Missouri River Snowpack and Drought Monitoring Program was created to make certain the U.S. Army Corps has the information and the tools necessary to manage the Missouri River in a way that protects communities from flood threats posed by the annual runoff. As the lead agency, the Corps should take all necessary steps to quickly and fully implement this program.

At your earliest convenience, I am requesting a briefing on the Corps' plans to manage the Missouri River and corresponding releases in light of these recent snowpack levels and an update on the status of the implementation of the Missouri River Snowpack and Drought Monitoring Program.

I appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M. Michael Rounds". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "M." and last name "Rounds" being clearly legible.

M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator