

# Branstad: Iowa's focus on results has paid off since the Missouri River floods

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As state leaders we have been actively engaged in Missouri River flood response and recovery efforts since late May. Our main goals regarding the Missouri River are to help Iowans recover from flooding as quickly as possible and to improve the management of the Missouri River. On these goals, we are interested in clear results.

Thus, we were disappointed by The Des Moines Register's editorial criticizing the state's withdrawal from the Missouri River Association of States and Tribes (MoRAST). The editorial seems to demonstrate a lack of understanding of the various avenues available to the state to more effectively address relevant Missouri River items and ignores the long-standing concerns of western Iowans about the ineffectiveness of MoRAST.

Throughout the various stages of the flooding and recovery, state leaders have met repeatedly with impacted Iowans, local officials, and our counterparts from other states and federal agencies. This summer, the governors of the Missouri River basin formed the Governors' Missouri River Working Group to directly engage on Missouri River management and recovery items.

**This working group has allowed state officials** to discuss various perspectives and communicate priorities and concerns with leaders from federal agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the U.S. Department of Transportation. Beyond the formal meetings, we have had numerous conversations with other governors, senior state leaders, and federal officials, including Corps and FEMA leaders.

Unfortunately, at the recent MoRAST meeting it became apparent that the organization would remain unresponsive to the concerns of downriver interests. In addition, the Corps' initial response to the request of the Governors' Missouri River Working Group to adjust river management plans for 2012 was met with resistance. As such, both governors Branstad and Dave Heineman of Nebraska determined additional action was necessary to demonstrate the resolve of downriver states to effect change, and the decision was made to withdraw from MoRAST.

Perhaps coincidentally, perhaps not, but just days after our decision to leave MoRAST, the Corps reversed its previous stance and announced it would alter its management of the Missouri River over the next year. This is a win for Iowa and all downriver states.

**Iowa's interagency Missouri River authority** pulls together various perspectives and has been a key avenue to analyzing Missouri River issues and to driving conversations with stakeholders, including impacted Iowans and our partners from other states and federal departments.

Iowa's interagency river authority has held multiple public meetings over the last several months, including a several-hour forum in Council Bluffs in September which gave Iowans a direct avenue to engage state and federal officials.

State personnel have made flood recovery a top priority. The Iowa DOT has worked with many stakeholders to expedite the repairs to approximately 70 miles of our federal roads — including the reopening of Interstate 680 in only 34 days.

We support membership in organizations that effectively and fairly reflect the state's priorities and interests.

Many western Iowa residents have long expressed concerns that MoRAST's narrow scope does not adequately reflect the diverse stakeholders along the Missouri River.

State agencies have previously expressed frustration that MoRAST did not adequately include dissenting opinions in letters and position statements. We also believe that membership organizations should bring all relevant entities to the table and should be successful in building coalitions across varied stakeholders. By all of these measures MoRAST did not deliver results for Iowa and other downstream states.

**We could understand a defense** of MoRAST if it had proven to be an effective organization, but for Iowa it only proved to be a sap on limited taxpayer resources and an ineffective intermediary.

Full recovery from the flooding along the Missouri River will take time and much hard work remains. Our actions over the last several months have reflected our belief that more direct discussions with relevant local, state, and federal partners will allow for enhanced engagement on Missouri River management, an expedited recovery, and better prioritization of flood control over recreational and other uses.

We encourage the Register to focus on results over process and welcome direct high-level engagement on Missouri River flood recovery and management that respects the multiple perspectives of relevant stakeholders.