

Dear Interested Stakeholder in Missouri River Basin Endangered Species Recovery and Restoration Issues:

You are cordially invited to help the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution in selecting a team of highly experienced independent mediators to assist with two projects related to the recovery of endangered species in the Missouri River Basin. The U.S. Institute is an independent federal agency established by Congress to assist parties in resolving environmental, natural resource, and public lands issues and conflicts. The U.S. Institute serves as an impartial, non-partisan institution providing professional expertise and services to all parties involved in resolving environmental conflicts.

The first effort of the mediation team will be to facilitate an intergovernmental and stakeholder process to develop the highest level of agreement possible, within the available time constraints, on a recommendation to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a 2006 "spring rise," which was stipulated in the 2003 Amended Biological Opinion issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in regard to the revision of the Missouri River Master Water Control Manual. The recommendations to the Corps must be developed before August so they can be included in the 2006 Draft Annual Operating Plan, which must then be released for formal public comment.

The second project of the mediation team involves conducting an initial situation assessment to guide the design and convening of the Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee, which is envisioned as a multi-stakeholder process to assist the Corps in determining actions to be pursued under its Missouri River Recovery Implementation Program.

A number of entities have supported seeking the assistance of the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution to provide independent and impartial expertise in securing professional mediation services for these two projects. Support for the U.S. Institute's involvement has come from the Missouri River Basin Association and its members, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and the National Park Service, as well as from The Nature Conservancy and American Rivers. Other stakeholders have also been informed of the request to the U.S. Institute through the discussions among members of the Missouri River Basin Association.

The U.S. Institute would very much like to work closely with interested and affected stakeholders, as well as with tribes and the federal and state agencies with jurisdictional authority and responsibilities, in selecting a team of highly skilled and experienced mediators. Once selected, the initial immediate task of the Institute's mediation team will be to quickly begin designing the "spring rise" process, establishing meeting dates, and determining meeting locations, in consultation with a small Core Planning Group, composed of agency and stakeholder representatives. The U.S. Institute will shortly be seeking your suggestions on individuals who would be willing to assist the U.S. Institute's mediation team in designing the spring rise process. It is anticipated that the "spring rise" process itself will involve at least two plenary meetings with broad and inclusive participation by designated representatives of federal, state, and tribal agencies and governments, as well as interested and affected stakeholders and nongovernmental organizations. In addition, it is anticipated that one or more working groups may be established to examine specific technical issues, gather relevant information, explore options, and prepare proposals for consideration by the full intergovernmental group. The mediation team will provide professional impartial facilitation for all meetings.

You are cordially invited to participate in selecting the mediation team that will work under the supervision of the U.S. Institute in support of these two projects. You are welcome to participate in one of three ways:

1. You can review the proposals of the final candidates identified by the U.S. Institute and submit your written comments on their qualifications;
2. You can review the proposals submitted by the final candidates and then participate in their interviews via conference call; or

3. You can review the proposals submitted by the final candidates and then participate directly in their in-person interviews.

If you would like to attend the interviews, we will provide as many participants as possible with an opportunity to ask questions of the candidates, as well as to indicate your preferences among the different candidates at the conclusion of the interviews. Although the U.S. Institute will be making the final selection decision, we have a strong interest in identifying a mediation team that is both highly skilled at helping parties reach agreement on solutions to difficult problems and who are also acceptable to all stakeholders with an interest in Missouri River endangered species recovery and restoration issues. The U.S. Institute will contract with and directly oversee the work of the selected mediation team.

Interviews with final candidate are scheduled for Tuesday, April 12, from 8:30am to 5:00pm, in Omaha, NE. (The specific location is still to be determined.) As the U.S. Institute's Senior Program Manager assigned to this project, I will be facilitating the interview process. You can expect it to be a long day. I understand and appreciate that this is a big commitment of your time. Without your assistance, however, and your willingness to engage in a good faith effort to work with other stakeholders and the responsible agencies in developing a viable spring rise proposal, the proposed process cannot be successful. So, the contribution of your time and your thoughtful perspectives on the qualifications of the different mediation teams would be greatly appreciated. In fairness to all the prospective candidate teams, if you do intend to participate in the selection process, I will ask that you prepare by reading all the proposals in advance and that you attend all the interviews.

PLEASE RESPOND BEFORE FRIDAY, APRIL 1, IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INTERVIEWS TO SELECT THE MEDIATION TEAM, EITHER IN-PERSON OR BY CONFERENCE CALL. You can contact me by email or by phone at the number listed below. I will then provide you with the proposals of the final candidates to review in advance of the interviews. For those participating by conference call, I will provide a toll-free (800) Call-In Number.

If you cannot participate in the interviews but would like to review the proposals of the final candidates and provide your written comments on their qualifications, please let me know, as well. I will need to receive your written comments no later than Friday, April 8, so they can be considered in making the final selection decision.

For further information about the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, please see our website at: www.ecr.gov. If you have any concerns or questions about the mediator selection process, please feel free to contact me at the email address or phone number below.

The U.S. Institute's announcement that was issued on March 4, to recruit a pool of appropriately qualified mediators is attached for your information.

Thanks for your interest and assistance in selecting an appropriate mediation team. Your active involvement in these early stages will help create the foundation for a productive spring rise decision process.

Our email distribution list of interested stakeholders is still being developed. Please pass this email along to others you think might be interested. Thank you.

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