



Mounds Lake Reservoir UWRWA Position Statement

The UWRWA (“Alliance”) is a 16-county consortium of local governments, utilities, universities, agricultural and industrial producers and the regional community who work to improve and protect water quality throughout the Upper White River Watershed.

The Alliance is the principal regional watershed institution devoted to providing resources, educational programs and partnerships, and serves to promote, protect, and enhance the biological, chemical, and physical integrity of the Upper White River Watershed ecosystem. This ecosystem includes us, the people who inhabit the watershed.

Our hope is that when such substantial projects as the Mounds Lake Reservoir are proposed they are evaluated in the context of sustainable regional planning. Water supply shortage, flood control or even recreational objectives need to be considered at a watershed scale. It is important that all impacts and opportunities are able to influence project development in the most beneficial way possible for people and the environment they/we depend on.

The water resources necessary to meet the daily needs of our society are vitally important. We appreciate the goals of the proposed reservoir: to meet the anticipated water demand of the future, provide a recreational asset and promote economic development around Anderson. However, in light of the known and anticipated environmental impacts of reservoir construction, the Alliance would like to insure that a holistic assessment of both natural and social resources is conducted prior to undertaking such a massive, landscape-altering project. Undoubtedly, future National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) evaluations will occur if this project idea is advanced, yet several important discussions should occur prior to that stage of the project. Discussions should at least include watershed-wide water supply evaluations including the role of conservation and reuse to address future shortages, regional habitat planning, and the evaluation of changing land-use as it relates to the permanent loss of ecological functions provided by wetlands, floodplains, forests, and other key existing conditions.

Upon review of the current study, and in the context of our deep knowledge of the watershed and its resources, we would like to highlight some of the possible environmental impacts that may occur with reservoir construction. The following list, while not intended to be exhaustive, represents just a few of the more ominous and deleterious effects to natural processes. These issues and concerns need to stay forefront in discussions and be evaluated to their fullest by project sponsors.

- Permanent loss of unique habitats, flora and fauna; the effects of these losses lead to unpredictable changes throughout the environment, many of which can affect our daily lives, many in ways that are often unseen or unaccounted for in traditional environmental impact analyses
- Permanent loss of land use types such as riparian wetlands, floodplains and forest and the resulting loss of ecological functions these critical areas provide to local water quality, downstream water quality, flood control, and air quality
- Loss of important sediments (when they become trapped inside the reservoir) upon which our river depends for stable banks – consequential and sometimes dramatic, riverbank erosion can have profound effects on water quality and habitats, further impacting downstream populations

- Increased algal blooms and their associated taste and odor compounds and potential toxins, as well as increased bacteria concentrations, oxygen-depletion, and many other alterations to local and downstream water quality due to trapping sediments and accumulating other pollutants inside the reservoir
- Pollution loads associated with impacts to individual parcels and their associated environmental risks (eg. underground storage tanks, contaminated soils, etc.)
- Downstream impacts to water quality and quantity and the impacts associated with modified downstream flow regimes, including potential impacts to baseflow and groundwater supplies
- Loss of irreplaceable natural and cultural heritage associated with one of our state's largest rivers

Together these factors can contribute to unforeseen costs and additional impacts to the quality of life we all enjoy. The UWRWA supports the consideration of alternative strategies to address the issues and goals this project intends to affect. For instance, low-cost conservation campaigns and modernized ordinances regarding water usage can sharply reduce demand and potentially eliminate the need for drastic measures (such as river impoundment) at a fraction of the cost. Similarly, many communities nationwide have had success redeveloping around their rivers without impounding them. Redevelopment that treats the river as an asset could cost significantly less financially and result in fewer environmental impacts while simultaneously improving the river's overall condition.

As this project moves through the public hearing and environmental review stages of pre-development, the Upper White River Watershed Alliance urges all parties consciously consider and weigh the costs of the proposed reservoir's social and environmental impacts with the benefits being promoted as justification for the reservoir's development. Only then can we fully and fairly understand its impact and broaden our awareness of possible solutions to the water resource challenges that are facing all of central Indiana. As a region of interdependent stakeholders, our solutions to these challenges must involve progressive, holistic regional planning. Our Alliance welcomes the opportunity to further contribute to these discussions.