MEMORANDUM OF COMMON PURPOSE

Between

Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative and the Red Lake Nation, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, and the White Earth Nation

Whereas, the Mississippi River is sacred to and the lifeblood of those that depend on it for their livelihoods, culture, and future; and

Whereas, over fifteen American Indian tribes have called the Mississippi River Valley home; and

Whereas, the Indigenous Nations of the Mississippi River headwaters region including the Red Lake Nation, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, and White Earth Nation (Indigenous Nations of the headwaters region) have maintained prosperous and united communities; and

Whereas, over one hundred modern American cities that reside along the banks of the main stem Mississippi River share one corridor with the Indigenous Nations that have taken care of this land for millennium; and

Whereas, the first and later peoples that now have their homes in the Mississippi River Valley can come together at a new level of cooperation to ensure the future prosperity of Middle America; and

Whereas, the Mississippi River Valley includes one of the most crucial freshwater supplies in the world making possible a vital economy and ecology for North America and the global food supply; and

Whereas, the Mississippi River Corridor provides habitat for a significant portion of the Earth’s biological diversity and comprise the largest area of contiguous freshwater wildlife habitat in North America;

Whereas, the Mississippi River Valley is home to 70 species of waterfowl that migrate along the Central and Mississippi Flyways of North America;

Whereas, the Mississippi River Valley is a vital migration corridor for 40 percent of North America’s waterfowl and 60 percent of its bird species;

Whereas, freshwater habitats in the Upper Mississippi River basin support 25 percent of all fish species in North America; and

Whereas, the Mississippi River drains an area of 1.2 million square miles, nearly 40 percent of the continental United States;

Whereas, the Mississippi River Corridor generates nearly $500 billion in annual revenue directly supporting 1.5 million U.S. jobs; and

Whereas, the Mississippi River touches 10 states, more than 30 Congressional districts and over 120 cities and towns as it flows some 2,530 miles from its headwaters in Minnesota into the Gulf of Mexico; and

Whereas, the Mississippi River makes up one third of the U.S. inland waterways, moving 47 percent of the nation’s inland waterway commerce totaling approximately 500 million tons of cargo each year; and

Whereas, watershed health is vital to providing clean, safe Mississippi River water for more than 50 cities and 20 million people relying on the Mississippi River for daily water supply; and

Whereas, the freshwater economy of the Mississippi River Valley is primarily comprised of the manufacturing, tourism, outdoor recreation, and agriculture economies generating $458 billion in annual revenue directly supporting 1.3 million jobs; and

Whereas, there is a need in establishing and nurturing long-term collaborative relationships with diverse interests using the capabilities, expertise, and constituent reach of the Indigenous Nations to reduce said risks and vulnerabilities at scale using the capacity of broad ecological restoration and conservation performance; and
Whereas, the Mississippi River has the largest global trade footprint of any inland waterway in Western Hemisphere giving it a significant stake for global investment; and

Whereas, waterways and ports in the Mississippi River ten-state corridor move $164.6 billion in agricultural products to U.S. and foreign markets. 55 to 70 percent of all U.S. exported corn, soy, and wheat as well as 60 percent of America’s corn and soybean exports (40 percent of the nation’s total agricultural output) move on the Mississippi River, the majority of which is exported creating a trade surplus for the nation; and

Whereas, with estimated population increases there will be increased pressures on land and water resources to produce food, fuel, and fiber for North America and the world; and

Whereas, the corridor has sustained over $50 billion in natural disaster impacts within the Mississippi River Valley since 2011. On average over the last five years, disasters are costing the Mississippi River economy as a whole close to 3 percent annually; and

Whereas, the mayors of the ten-state Mississippi River corridor are unifying around a common vision of resilience and sustainability that involves each doing her part to absorb disaster risk on site instead of shunting it down river with increased hazard to other communities; and

Whereas, the natural wonder and integrity of the Mississippi River Valley have been compromised by over a century of pursuing priorities that relegate the ecological health of the river system to a secondary consideration; and

Whereas, restoring the ecology of the Corridor can play a heightened role in cleaning and moving water. Nature can move and manage more water more efficiently, to more benefit than built infrastructure ever can. For instance, across North America, inland wetlands provide an estimated $237 billion in water flow regulation services annually; and

Whereas, the Mayors of the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI) have developed priorities around making the Mississippi River’s ecology and economy more sustainable as part of the association’s efforts to bring national emphasis to the Mississippi while spearheading an unprecedented level of regional cooperation and consensus; and

Whereas, the Indigenous Nations of the Mississippi River headwaters region have been exemplary caretakers of the divers and delicate ecosystems of the birthplace of the Mississippi; and

Whereas, modern cities along the Mississippi River can learn much from how the Indigenous Nations of the headwaters region have persisted in the face of tremendous adversity to create thriving communities; and

Whereas, the leadership of MRCTI and the leadership of the Indigenous Nations of the Mississippi River headwaters region have found common purpose in pursuing a new degree of cooperation to meet the present-day challenges of making the Corridor more resilient and sustainable; and

Whereas, the Mayors of MRCTI anticipate this Memorandum will facilitate the collaboration, promulgation, development, and expansion of better ways for cities and communities to understand the River and one another; and

Whereas, the MRCTI authority to enter into this Memorandum is pursuant to By-Laws Article 13 that bestows permanent authority on MRCTI to prosecute projects in cooperation with third parties, and the following administrative provisions apply for this agreement:

Whereas, the leadership of MRCTI and the leadership of the Indigenous Nations of the Mississippi River headwaters region have found common purpose in pursuing a new degree of cooperation to meet the present-day challenges of making the Corridor more resilient and sustainable; and

Whereas, the Mayors of MRCTI anticipate this Memorandum will facilitate the collaboration, promulgation, development, and expansion of better ways for cities and communities to understand the River and one another; and

Whereas, the MRCTI authority to enter into this Memorandum is pursuant to By-Laws Article 13 that bestows permanent authority on MRCTI to prosecute projects in cooperation with third parties, and the following administrative provisions apply for this agreement:

(a) Nothing in this Memorandum may be construed to obligate MRCTI or the Red Lake, Leech Lake, or White Earth Nations to any current or future expenditure of resources either in advance of the availability of capital from third parties or when funds are available.

(b) This MOU does not create an actual or implied intention, or requirement for MRCTI or the Indigenous Nations included herein to enter into a contract or
an assistance agreement (e.g., grant or cooperative agreement).

(c) This agreement in no way restricts MRCTI or the signed Indigenous Nations from participating in similar activities or arrangements with other public or private agencies, organizations, or individuals.

(d) Nothing in this agreement may be interpreted to imply that the Red Lake, Leech Lake, or White Earth Nations endorses any product, service or policy of the MRCTI nor vice versa.

(e) This agreement is effective upon the date of the last signature. The term of this agreement shall be for five (5) years.

(f) This agreement may be modified at any time in writing by either party with the written concurrence of the other party, signed by a duly authorized representative.

Now, therefore, Mayors of the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative and the Indigenous Nations of the headwaters region enter into this memorandum of common purpose as the underpinning to establish and perpetuate an era of cooperation and collaboration between the Mayors along the Main Stem Mississippi River and the Indigenous Nations of the headwaters region to better understand each other, develop common goals and objectives that encourage the prosperity of all communities along the entire ten-state length of the main stem Mississippi River, and, most importantly, determine a manner and enshrined method through which the leadership of the Indigenous Nations and Mayors of Mississippi River cities may play a more permanent role and formal role together.

Furthermore, that through this agreement the parties commit to the following:

a. MRCTI will facilitate, motivate, and recommend that member cities reach-out to the Indigenous Nation communities of member cities in an effort to nurture and invite better working relationships between Mayor and Indigenous Nation leaders.

b. Red Lake, Leech Lake, and White Earth Nations will advise and consult with MRCTI on methods, manners, and practices that can better position MRCTI member cities to engage Indigenous Nations along the Mississippi River as well as reach-out to other Indigenous Nation communities along the Mississippi.

c. MRCTI and the Indigenous Nations of the headwaters region will consult and work together to identify and outline a process through which the Indigenous Nations of the Mississippi River may play a heightened a more permanent role with MRCTI member cities that may involve the development of a persistent mechanism or structure within MRCTI for Indigenous Nation membership.

d. MRCTI and the Indigenous Nations of the headwaters region will work together to identify opportunities along the corridor for targeted funding and potential for project aggregation and to receive support by policymakers, financial institutions, and the private/public sectors.

e. MRCTI and the Indigenous Nations of the headwaters region will work together to profile and promote this partnership to third party entities within the parameters of MRCTI’s and the Indigenous Nation’s normal schedule of operations, protocols, business practices, and standards. This MOCP may be used by signatories to attract fundraising and philanthropic support for the MOCP activities to be fully realized and implemented.

Entered into by the principals whose signatures appear below On this, the 12th day of September 2023.