Location: The authorized study area is comprised of 3,011 square miles located in St. Louis City, St. Louis County, and Jefferson County in Missouri and St. Clair, Madison, and Monroe Counties in Illinois.

Description: A 2004 reconnaissance study investigated problems and opportunities for flood damage reduction, aquatic habitat restoration, and harbor safety issues in the entire project area. The study recommended proceeding with a potential feasibility study for the Meramec River, pending completion of a reconnaissance report addendum. This addendum was initiated in 2011 and focused on the Meramec River Basin within St. Louis and Jefferson Counties, Missouri. This recon report focused on a declining aquatic environment adversely affected by habitat fragmentation and excessive sedimentation and it was signed, approved, and finalized in June of 2013. Several mill dams prevent upstream migration of fish from the Meramec into the upper portions of the Big River. Additionally, the Big River is a main tributary to the Meramec and is listed as impaired with over 55 river miles adversely affected by sediment containing cadmium, lead, and zinc. The EPA is actively working on the Jefferson County Superfund Site that encompasses the entire county. EPA will be addressing the Superfund Site and the overall CERCLA compliance of the site. This Recon, PMP and Feasibility Study will address the project from an ecosystem restoration perspective dealing with the downstream transport of sediments, fish passage issues, and bed and bank instabilities that threaten the few remaining mussel beds known to be strongholds for the endangered species.

Issues: EPA is managing an active Superfund site within the study area. A joint Project Management Plan has been developed to detail logistics of the joint Feasibility Study. The FS and PMP will coordinate the parallel measures related to the respective agencies Restoration or Remediation goals.

Importance: Missouri Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) has prioritized this project. Additionally, MDNR has expressed willingness to serve as a cost share sponsor on a feasibility study for an aquatic ecosystem restoration project within the Meramec River Basin, including the Big River watershed. The Urban Waters Federal Partnership has selected this project as one of eleven national waters of significance. UWFP is a campaign within the Presidents Great Outdoors Initiative, and is interested in connecting urban areas and disadvantaged individuals within these areas with waterbodies that are inaccessible due to the degraded nature. Aquatic ecosystem restoration goals are to improve habitat through restoring natural riverine transport function and implementation of fish passage, as well as minimization of downstream migration and impacts of high lead, zinc, and cadmium concentrations from Big River mine tailings sources to the Meramec River and the Mississippi River.

Risk: Five federally endangered mussel species are listed within the Meramec and Big Rivers. MDNR, USFWS, and others are currently identifying some of the last remaining beds that occur within the watersheds. Preliminary information shows that there are few. This and other studies are also identifying bank and bed instabilities that threaten these scarce habitats.

Consequence: Federal involvement would be limited to USEPA. Only the remediation of the watershed would take place and the ecosystem that could support a wide variety of species, and assist in the recovery of endangered species, will only be restored to precontaminant conditions.

Activities for FY 15: Carryover funds from FY14 will be used to initiate feasibility study under the SMART Planning Process, finalize the Project Management Plan (PMP), and initiate the Feasibility Cost Sharing Agreement (FCSA).

Acquisition Strategy: No contracts are scheduled to be awarded in FY 15.

Amount That Could Be Used in FY 16: $700,000 will be used to identify a tentatively selected plan, finalize the agency decision milestone, and move toward a Civil Works Review board on the study recommendations.

Project Sponsor/Customer: Missouri Department of Natural Resources (The USFWS and MDNR are co-administrators of the Natural Resource Damage Assessment account, resulting from settlement with mining companies)

Congressional Interest: Senate: Blunt and McCaskill (MO) House: Clay (MO-1), Wagner (MO-2), Luetkemeyer (MO-3), and Smith (MO-8)