

# INTERNATIONAL DELTA ROUNDTABLE

BRUCE REID, NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY  
NOVEMBER 29, 2007

## *The Role of Education in Creating Sustainable Communities*



**Audubon**

MISSISSIPPI RIVER INITIATIVE

# A managed system, still a system

*Addressing sustainability requires an understanding of the entire Mississippi River system*



# An arrested system

## A dynamic river

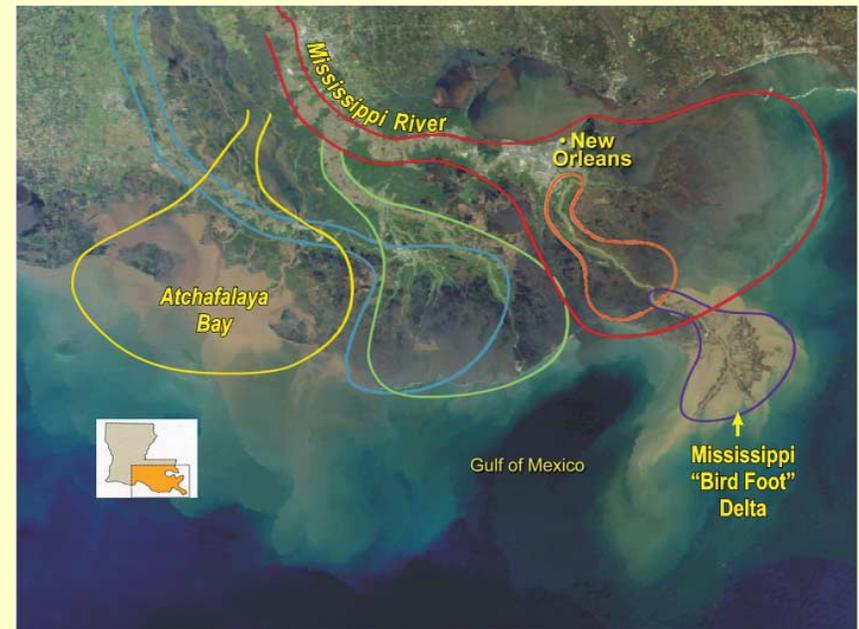


Photograph courtesy: Mississippi River Commission

AIR VIEWS SHOW WHAT AMAZING LOOPS AND SINUOUS BENDS THE MEANDERING LOWER MISSISSIPPI MAKES

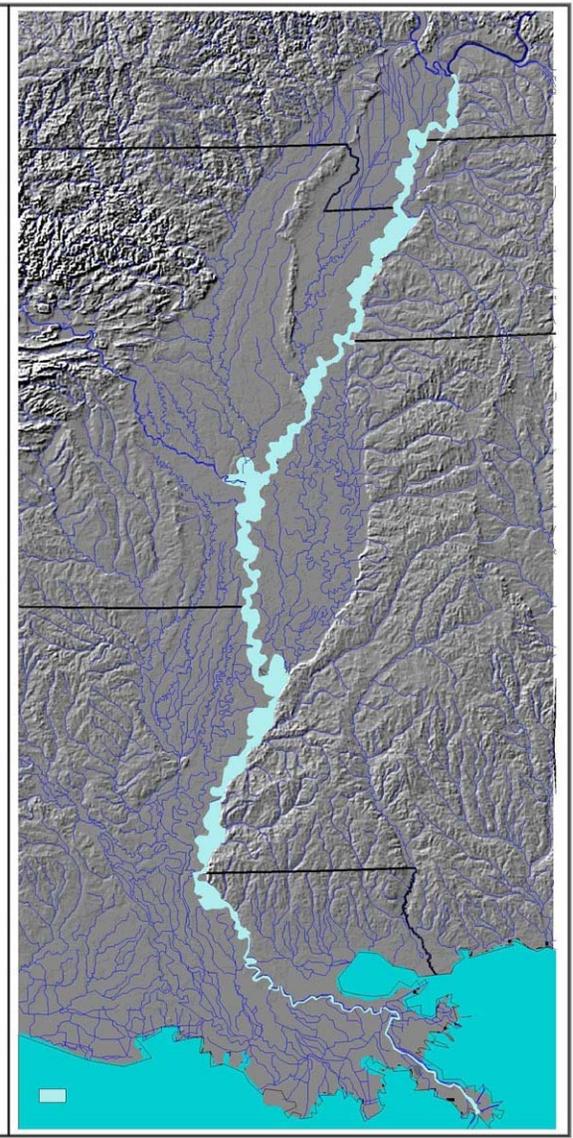
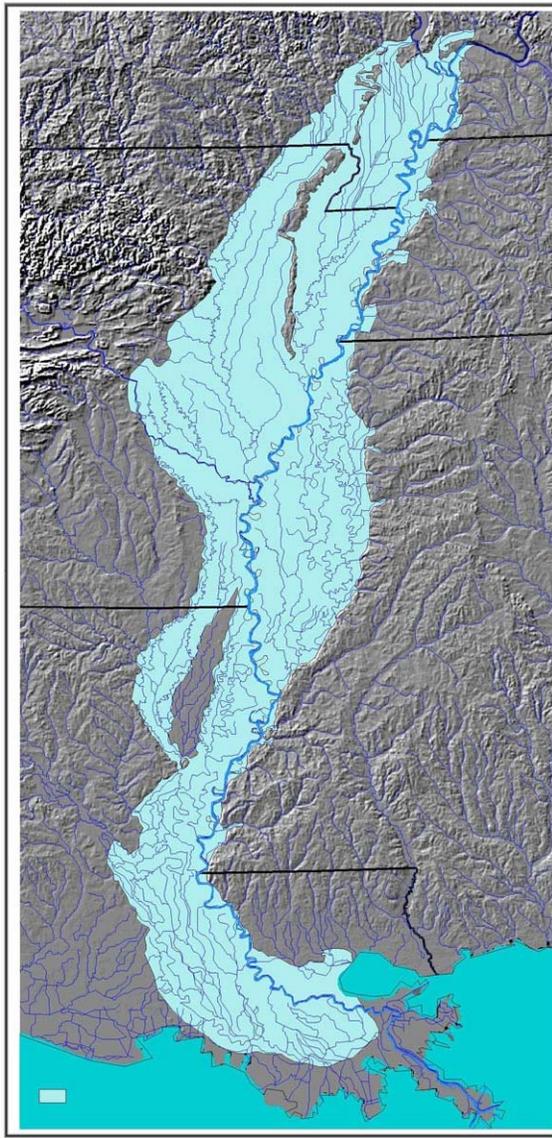
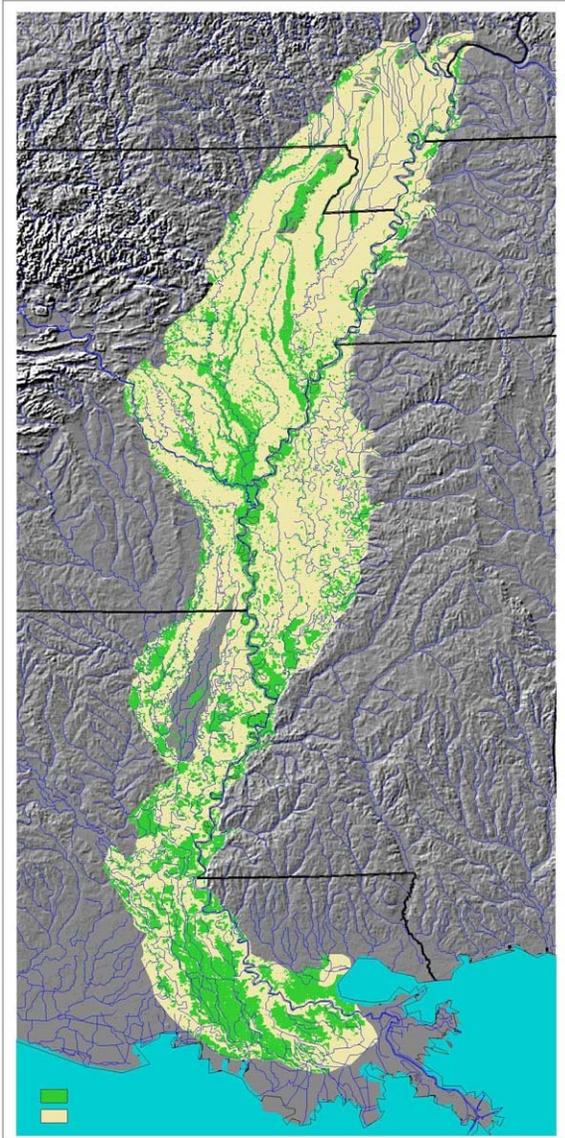
Here are the "Greenville Bends," between Mississippi and southern Arkansas. Greenville, Mississippi, at the extreme right, is protected by levees. Tarpley, Leland, and Ashbrook Cutoffs are seen, showing how the river channel has been straightened and shortened.

## A changing delta



*From Science, March 2007*

# A diminished system



# A working system

Agriculture



Inland shipping



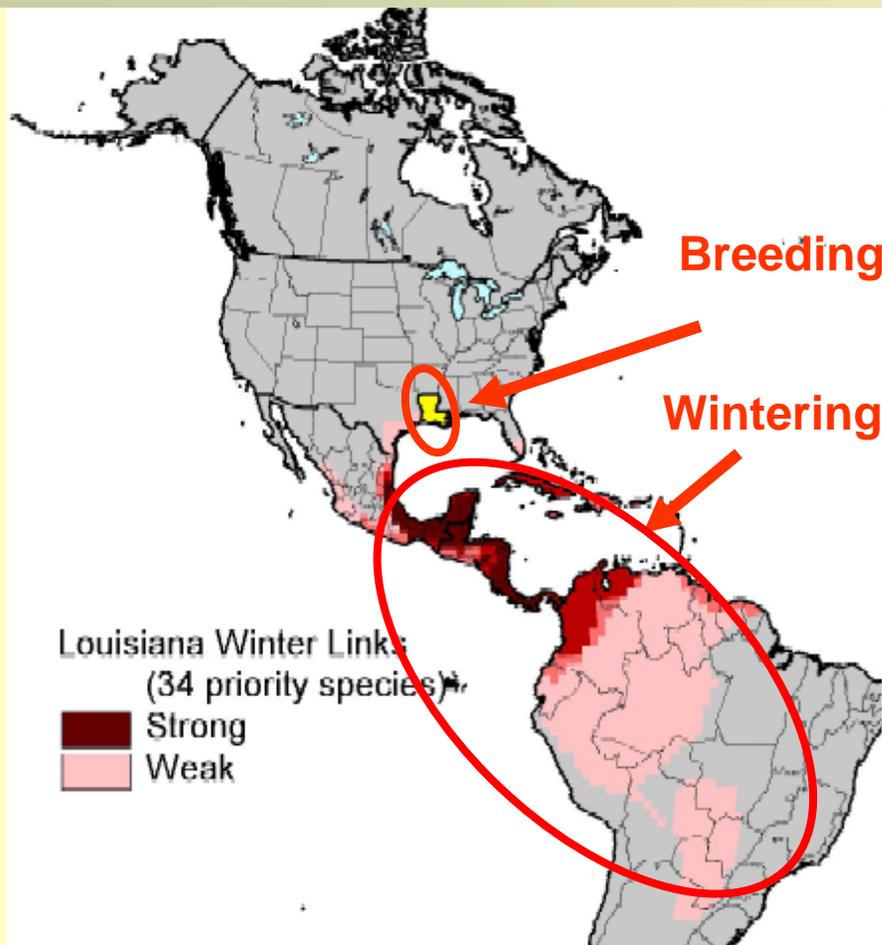
Oil and gas production



Seafood harvest

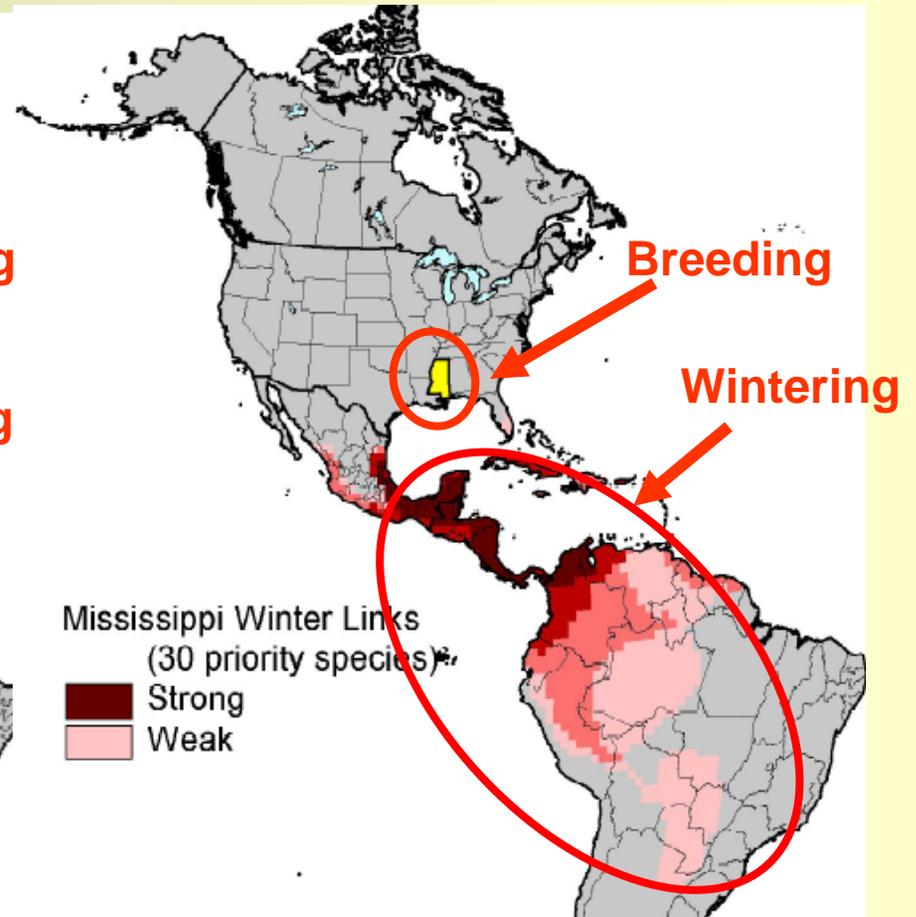


# Connecting birds and people



Source: Partners in Flight

**Wintering grounds of 34 priority species for Louisiana**



Source: Partners in Flight

**Wintering grounds of 30 priority species for Mississippi**

# What people don't want to hear

“... the concern that federal, publicly financed flood/control drainage programs and policies have been instrumental in transforming the nation's largest and most ecologically rich floodplain ecosystem into a region that is considered impoverished by most social, economic and environmental standards.”

*Sam Hamilton, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regional director, writing to Maj. Gen. Phillip Anderson, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in 2000.*

# How people view the Mississippi

- Bipartisan research team of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R)
- Six focus groups with voters conducted in late July with voters in the Quad Cities, St. Louis and Baton Rouge
- Telephone survey of 1,200 voters within two counties of the Mississippi River conducted August 25-29, 2007, with a margin of error of +/- 2.8%
- Telephone survey of 300 voters in counties away from the River – but still in the ten Mississippi River states -- conducted September 8-10, 2007, with a margin of sampling error of +/-5.7%

*Funded by the McKnight Foundation; part of a collaborative project of 35 NGOs*

# Opportunities

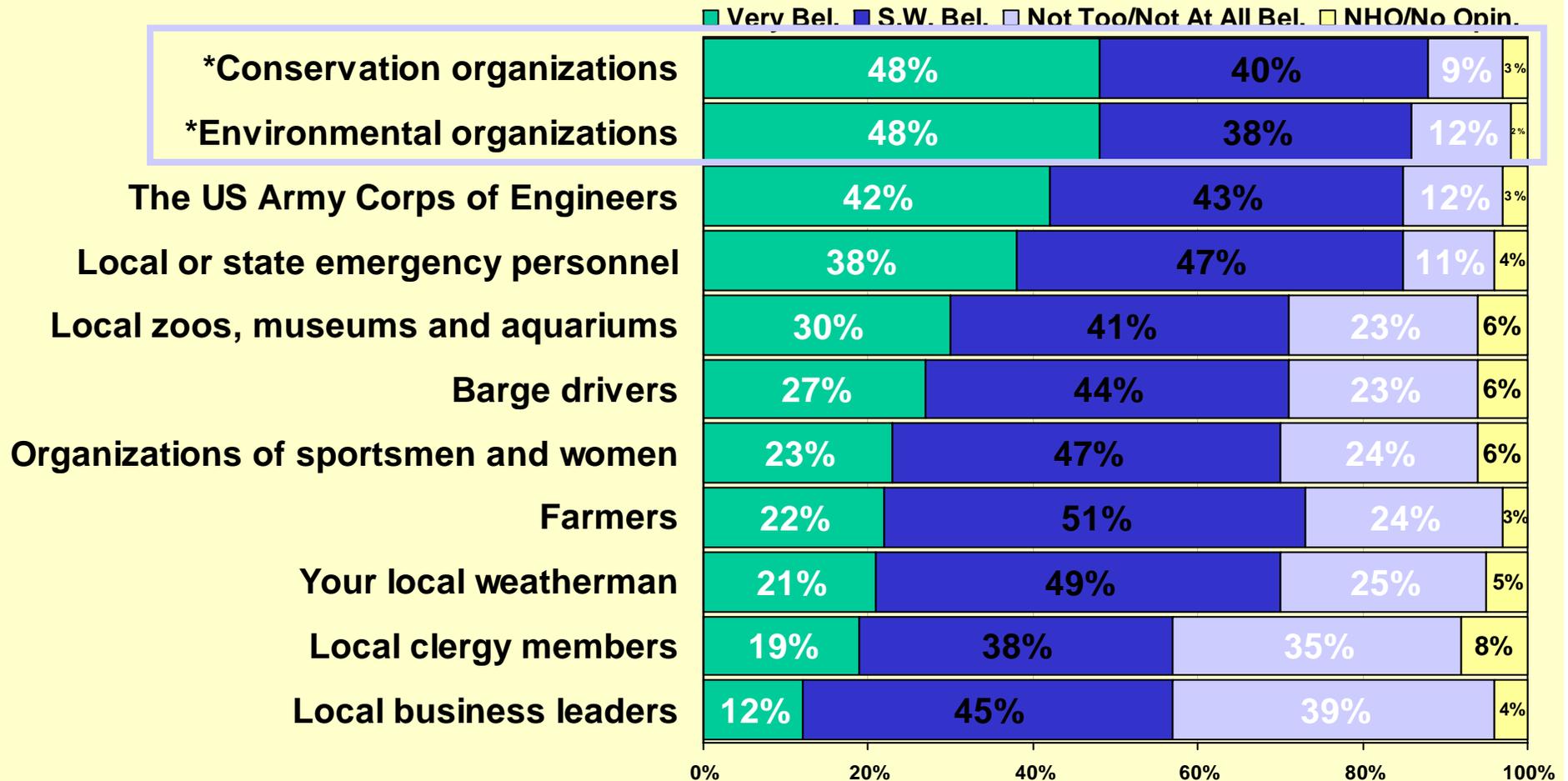
- Most voters see themselves as residents of the Mississippi River region, and appreciate its historic and cultural importance to their community.
- Voters are ambivalent about the condition of the River, and see pollution – primarily from sewage, industry, and farms – as the biggest threat facing it.
- In principle, voters overwhelmingly embrace numerous policy proposals to help the River.

# Challenges

- Voters' personal connections to the river are weak.
- There is little sense of an immediate or urgent threat to the river
- Voters see business and government – and not themselves – as primarily responsible for protecting the health of the River.
- Voters know relatively little about the river

# Who is credible

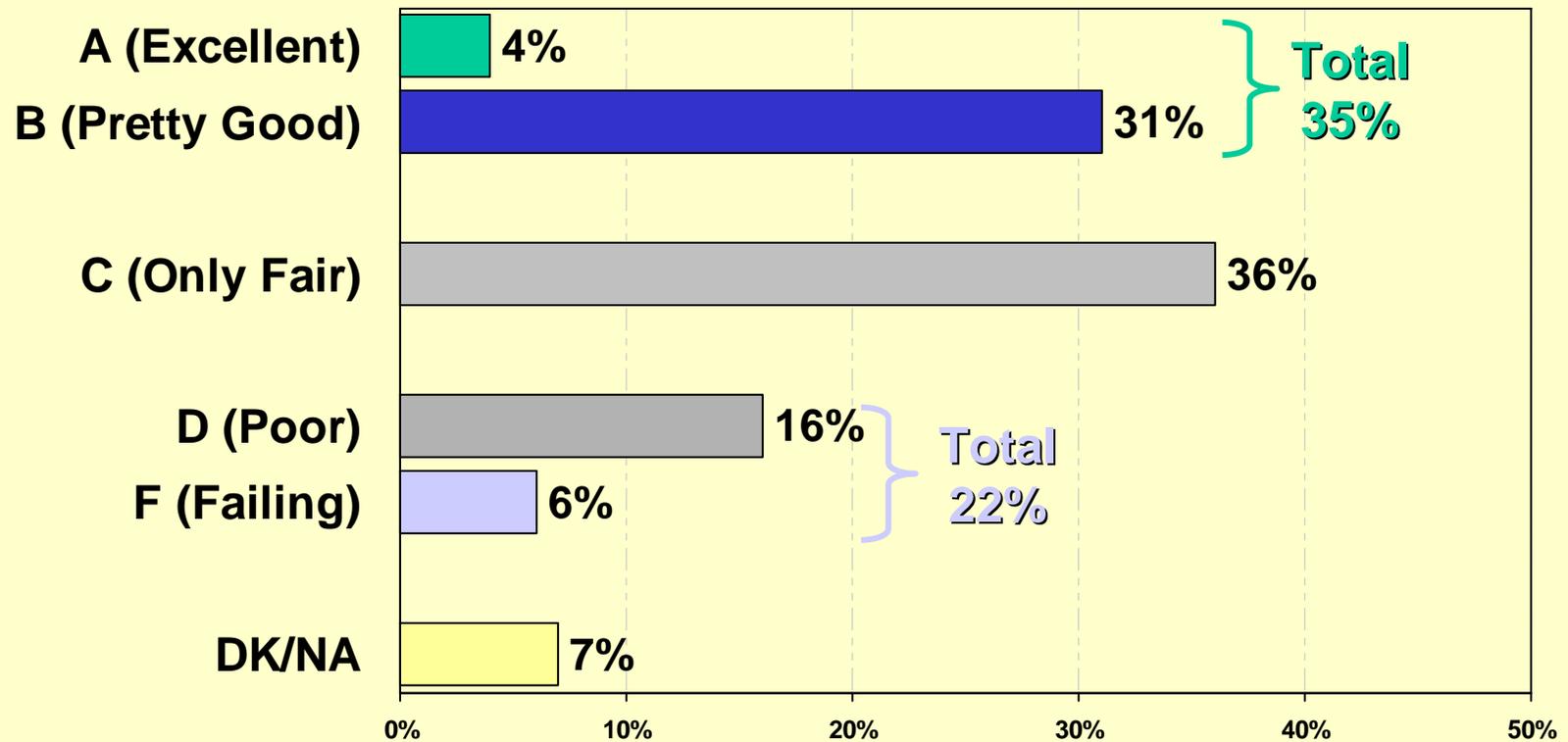
**Environmental and conservation organizations are highly credible messengers.**



17. I am now going to read you a list of people and organizations that may speak out on issues affecting the Mississippi River. Please tell me if you would find that person or organization's opinion very believable, somewhat believable, not too believable, or not believable at all. \* Split Sample

# Grading the river's health

Only one-third of voters grade the River's health positively.

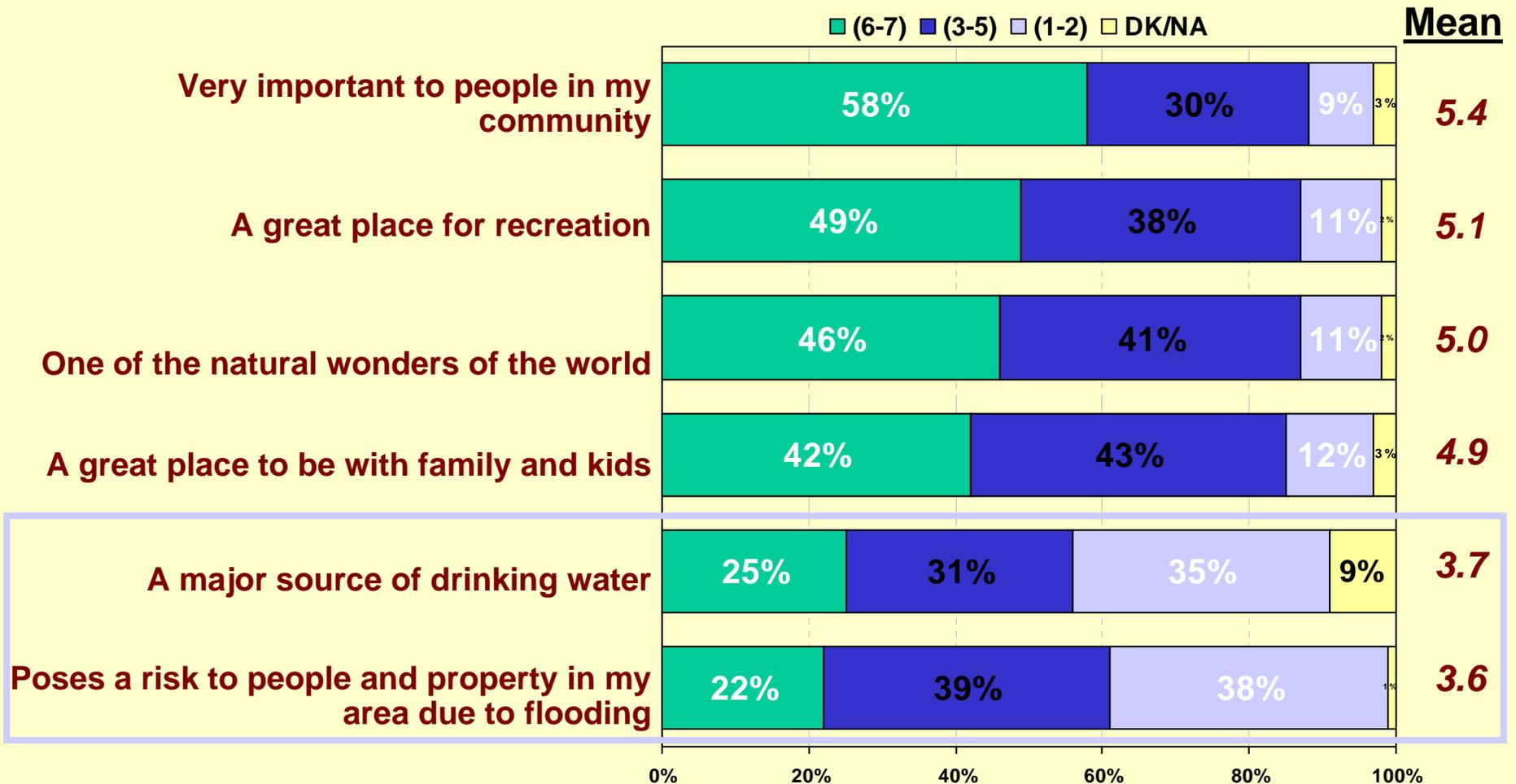


7. How would you rate the overall health of the Mississippi River in your area: would you give it a grade of A, for excellent; B, for pretty good; C, for only fair; D, for poor; or F, for failing?

# How people describe the river

## Voters associate positive traits with the River.

(Rated on a 1-to-7 Scale Where 1 Describes the River "Not at All" and 7 "Very Well")



8a-f. I'm going to read you a list of words and phrases. After you hear each one, please tell me how well you think it describes the Mississippi River, using a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 means it DOES NOT DESCRIBE THE RIVER WELL AT ALL and 7 means it describes the River VERY WELL. A rating of 4 is NEUTRAL. You can use any number between one and seven.

# Audubon Mississippi River initiative

- A coordinated effort from Minnesota to Louisiana
- Includes the Missouri and Ohio basins
- Conservation goals: birds, water quality, hydrology
- Audubon as convener; nine critical steps; communications/social marketing
- New agreement with the Army Corps of Engineers
- Conservation action on more than 2 million acres
- Major policy engagement in the valley and in D.C.



# Educational opportunities

- The Mississippi River Field Institute
- Local and regional nature tourism
- Birding, fishing, boating and bike trails
- River adventure trips
- Community greenway development
- Watershed restoration projects
- Scenic byway development





Audubon



## THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER FIELD INSTITUTE



# Mississippi River Field Institute



*... engaging people directly in the place you are trying to help them understand, appreciate and protect*

- A partnership with Tara Wildlife, Delta State University, Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, others for river-related education and stewardship
- Pilot courses began spring 2007; full-time project director to be hired in 2008 to make the Institute self-sustaining
- Tara provides large landscape for field experiences, modern conference center, overnight accommodations

# Institute programs

- Residential camps serving 400 youth annually at Tara
- Audubon Naturalist courses to train volunteers with service commitments
- Accredited workshops for science teachers, graduate students, adults
- Professional training in land, river and wildlife management, conservation practices, nature tourism business enterprises



# Benefits of the Institute

- With venues in Vicksburg and nearby Tara Wildlife, we are meeting the Corps on its own turf. Vicksburg is the nerve center of Mississippi River management.
- Provides a meeting place or neutral ground away from government offices (e.g., hosted river-wide Pallid Sturgeon Working Group and NGO-Corps meeting on integrating hurricane protection and ecological restoration).
- Provides a vehicle for promoting science and policy recommendations.



# Engaging the diverse populations

*Nature festivals in diverse communities (The Hummingbird Migration Celebration, Strawberry Plains Audubon Center, 8,000 participants in 2007*



*The Mighty Quapaws of Quapaw Canoe Co., Clarksdale, Mississippi*

# A tourism economy

- Nature tourists take more than 30 million trips in the lower river region each year, spending \$790 million
- Overall, tourists spend \$13 billion per year in the lower river region and support more than 180,000 jobs
- 2006 expenditures on wildlife-related recreation = \$122 billion
- Wildlife-watching expenditures nationally (\$45 billion) exceed those of fishing (\$42 billion) and hunting (\$23 billion)

**Sources: LMRCC, USFWS**



# **The real questions**

**How do educational programs translate into measurable and meaningful action by people and in communities?**

**How can educational programs be directed at specific conservation goals?**

