

Army Corps of Engineers considers shift toward watershed-based planning

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In a press conference held on November 14 to discuss their climate adaptation plan, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) discussed the possibility of an agency-wide shift toward holistic watershed management. Currently, many projects have operating rules based around their original intent, such as hydropower or water storage, that can complicate decision-making in times of flood or drought. For example, a 2012 drought in the Mississippi basin lowered water levels so far as to threaten barges' ability to transport goods along the river. However, navigability was not the original purpose for the reservoirs in question, so the Corps was unable to take the steps necessary to fill them, instead choosing to dynamite riverbed obstacles in order to maintain shipping traffic. Officials explained that a broader, watershed-based planning strategy would avoid conundrums like these by allowing the Corps to manage many individual projects as a single system, minimizing conflicts and incorporating wider community planning and ecological goals.

Sources: E&E News, United States Army Corps of Engineers
