

# THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER PLASTIC POLLUTION INITIATIVE

## CLEAN RIVER, CLEAN SEAS

The Mayors of the Mississippi River Valley are collaborating with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI) and the University of Georgia on the first initiative of its kind to combat plastic pollution along one of the world's greatest waterways.

### TACKLING PLASTIC POLLUTION ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

The Mississippi River Plastic Pollution Initiative enlists the help of ordinary 'citizen scientists' in America's heartland to collect data on the state of plastic pollution along the river. To date, over 100,000 plastic litter items have been catalogued through the project. The data gathered is helping to create the first-ever plastic pollution 'map' along the river, which can be used by cities and towns to take action.

Though this data reveals critical information on the source, type, and concentration of plastic litter along the river - there is still a lot more work to be done. In an effort to paint the most comprehensive picture of the state of plastic pollution, the initiative is continuing to expand, and will be collecting data in Rosedale and Greenville, Mississippi during June 2022.

### WHY PROTECT THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER?

The Mississippi River is America's most essential inland waterway, providing hundreds of billions of gallons of water each day to key industries, as well as drinking water to 20 million people in 50 cities in 10 states. The ecology of the river is rich in diversity, supporting the livelihoods of people living along the river as well as a wide range of plant and animal species. The river contributes \$400 billion to the U.S. economy each year and provides a home for over 12 million people within the basin.



#### THE PROBLEM

**Plastic Pollution** impacts more than the river valley. Up to 80% of marine plastic originates from land-based sources. It is estimated that **the Mississippi River drains 40% of the continental United States**, creating a conduit for our litter to reach the Gulf of Mexico.

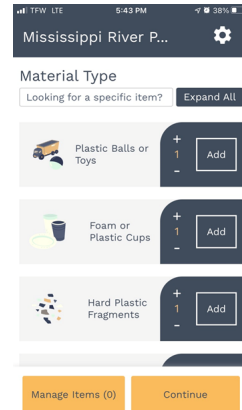
#### THE SOLUTION

**Mayors, researchers, citizens and local organizations** are coming together to collect data at different points along the river that can be utilized by decision-makers to **inspire and take action**. From schools to businesses, everyone can volunteer to collect data!

## CITIZEN SCIENCE AND THE MARINE DEBRIS TRACKER: HOW DOES IT WORK?

The data is being generated through a ‘**citizen science**’ approach, enlisting the participation of thousands of community volunteers.

Participants will be trained in the use of a free mobile phone app for tracking upstream and coastal litter, called the **Marine Debris Tracker**. This app was originally developed by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the University of Georgia. To date, Debris Tracker users have contributed over **5 million items** to an open-data platform.



Participants will use this app to record data on litter at different points along the river, using GPS to log locations. Training will be provided to citizen groups and individual volunteers so that data collection is clear and easy, and protocols will be provided to ensure that data collection is safe. To see a list of participating groups and to access the protocols, visit this website: [www.debristracker.org](http://www.debristracker.org).

Data collection can also be done by individuals at any time, over the course of a half an hour or a full day.

From Baton Rouge to Bettendorf, citizen scientists have been using the Debris Tracker to document plastic litter in cities along the lower, middle and upper Mississippi River.

Interested in getting involved in this work? Learn more about joining the next phase of data collection in the Mississippi Delta at: [www.unep.org/Mississippi](http://www.unep.org/Mississippi).



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