

# Modern Missouri River

**The modern Missouri** River has changed greatly since St. Charles was founded in 1769. The river, for example, is now straighter and shorter (72 miles shorter in its lower third). Why does the Missouri look so different today? Starting with snag boats that removed countless tree limbs from the river, we've reshaped the Big Muddy to make boat travel easier.

Now the Missouri is a single 300-foot-wide navigation channel maintained at 9 feet deep. That means a consistent current of 3-7 mph. Wing dikes, bank reinforcement,

and levees prevent the river from spreading into the floodplain and increase the power of floods. Six large upstream reservoirs built between 1940 and 1964 remove sediment from the Missouri River.

Fish that need a muddy Big Muddy—pallid sturgeon, flathead chub, and plains minnow—are in trouble. Projects such as notching dikes and creating secondary channels are now underway to help native Missouri River fish.

**Left to right:** The old Missouri River was wild and full of obstacles. One of the federal snag boats known as "Uncle Sam's toothpullers." Snag boats pulled out huge logs to improve navigation. Notched wing dike.



**Image credits:** State Historical Society of Missouri (1), St. Charles County Historical Society (2,3), Missouri Department of Conservation (4,background).