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The Missouri Compromised

Kate Casper Walker

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THE MISSOURI COMPROMISED

By

KATE CASPER WALKER

Bachelor of Arts, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, 1997

Professional Project

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
in Environmental Science and Natural Resource Journalism

The University of Montana
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Approved by:

Sandy Ross, Dean of The Graduate School
Graduate School

Denise Dowling, Chair
School of Journalism

Lee Banville
School of Journalism

Ray Ekness
School of Journalism

David Shively
Geography

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Abstract Title: A Brief Synopsis of **The Missouri Compromised**, a 30-minute Documentary Project

Chairperson: Denise Dowling

Abstract Content:

Recreation versus navigation. Flood control versus wildlife. Agriculture versus water quality. Arguments over Missouri River management have been spinning for decades, literally trapped by the 1940s ideas and engineering that transformed the river.

The Missouri Compromised is a 30-minute documentary that asks its audience to weigh the social and environmental tradeoffs when engineering a tremendously powerful natural system.

Once a passage for tradesmen and settlers into the West, as well as a dynamic and rich ecosystem, the Missouri River today bears the marks of humanity's control. The six main-stem dams on the upper Missouri, and the 750-mile bank-stabilized navigation channel on its lower section, have brought predictability to the once unruly river.

The Missouri River ecosystem suffers under these structures, however. Federal scientists state that 76 percent of native Missouri River species are uncommon or decreasing. Cottonwood trees, foundational to the river flood plain, rarely reproduce. And vital aquatic insects are down by 70 percent.

The film demonstrates the conflicts that arise when distinct parts of society cannot agree on how to share a natural resource. Using the decades-old debate between the recreation industry, which has flourished on the engineered river, and the navigation industry, which continues to struggle on the river despite its engineering, this film shares the viewpoints of people whose livelihoods rely on contrasting needs from an artificial system.

Finally the film includes the views of engineers, ecologists and the Army Corps of Engineers charged with managing the river's diverse uses. These scientists and managers discuss the prospects for reviving a natural system altered by an out-of-date engineering approach.

