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Climate Change Is Strangling the Mighty Mississippi. So Try Saving It.

The US must move faster to protect 200 years of shipping history on the nation's most crucial inland waterway.

Two weeks ago the supply chain almost ran aground in the Mississippi River. Thanks to drought and low water, more than 2,000 barges were backed up, delaying shipments of products ranging from corn to coal. The impacts were large: during the first week of October, barge shipments of corn were down 50% compared with the same time in 2021. Meanwhile, barge shipping rates reached their highest levels on record, pushing shippers to seek out more expensive and polluting rail cars and trucks. Consumers, already reeling from inflation, will pay the tab.

Fortunately, the barge jam eased in recent days. But users of the US's most important inland waterway can't simply sail on. Thanks to climate change, the Mississippi's natural cycles of drought and flooding are becoming more volatile, and weather events are becoming more extreme. Reversing these trends is as difficult as reversing the river itself. Adapting to them should be a national priority.

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Bloomberg Opinion

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October 21, 2022