
A LEGACY OF PROJECTION: FROM THE MERAMEC RIVER DAM TO THE DATA CENTER PUSH

To the Residents and Stewards of the Meramec River Basin,

History has a way of repeating itself, often wearing a different mask but posing the same fundamental question: Who decides the future of our land?

Fifty years ago, our predecessors stood where we stand today. In the 1970s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers proposed a massive project to dam the Meramec River near Sullivan Missouri. It was presented as a necessity for flood control and recreation, but the reality was a plan that would have drowned thousands of acres of pristine Ozark forest, destroyed unique cave ecosystems, and permanently silenced one of the last free flowing rivers in the Midwest.

The people of Franklin County, Crawford County and beyond didn't just voice their concerns, they organized. Through a grassroots movement that culminated in a historic 1978 referendum, local residents overwhelmingly rejected the dam. They chose the integrity of the river over a concrete monument to "progress." Because of their courage, we still enjoy the river's natural bends, its springs, and its world class smallmouth bass fishing.

Today, we face a new kind of encroachment. Instead of concrete walls and reservoirs, we are facing the industrial scale of massive data center developments. While these facilities don't involve literal floodgates, their impact on our community's resources is just as permanent. The proposed data centers in Franklin County represent our generation's version of the Meramec Dam. They come with promises of modernization, yet they threaten our landscape with massive resource consumption, environmental degradation, and cause irreversible change.

Data centers require millions of gallons of water for cooling and immense amounts of power, often straining local infrastructure. Unlike many other industrial processes, approximately 80% of the water used by data centers for evaporative cooling is lost to the atmosphere rather than being returned to the river or local treatment systems. This can significantly reduce the base flow of the Meramec, especially during dry summer months when the river is already stressed.

Large scale industrial footprints also lead to increased runoff, noise pollution, and the loss of the rural character that defines our region. The footprints of these several hundred-acre

facilities create significant amounts of impermeable surface area, leading to increased sediment and chemical runoff into the Meramec Basin. Data centers use biocides and other chemicals in their cooling systems to prevent the growth of bacteria and algae. These pollutants can find their way into the river system through wastewater discharge. Much like the proposed reservoir of 1978, once these industrial hubs are built, the natural silence and ecological health of the Meramec Basin cannot be easily restored.

We are the beneficiaries of the 1970s activists who refused to let their river be destroyed. Now, the responsibility falls to us. Stopping the unchecked expansion of data centers in our sensitive river corridors is not about being anti-technology, it is about being pro-community. We have the right to protect our soil, our water, and our quality of life. Just as the Army Corps of Engineers eventually packed up their blueprints and left the Meramec to flow free, we can ensure that Franklin County remains a place defined by its natural beauty rather than industrial sprawl.

Let us look to the victory of 1978 as our blueprint. By staying informed, attending council meetings, and speaking as one voice, we can keep the Meramec wild and our communities intact for the next fifty years. The river belongs to the people, and the future of its health belongs to us.

Andy McEwen

Owner

LouFly Guide Service, LLC

