

As the House Agriculture Committee debated amendments late into the night on the 2012 farm bill, a major victory was won for increased flood protection in a region of the country that few in Washington even knew was flooded last year. Most people outside of the Midwest do not know that the Missouri River swelled to 11 miles wide and swallowed up huge swaths of farmland and stretches of a major interstate during horrific flooding last summer.

You'd know if you visited today. Where there should be tall, green cornstalks around this time of year, today you'll find camel habitat — mounds of sand and arid desert-like conditions. Last year was a record flood year in the Missouri River basin thanks to historic rainfall and heavy snowpack upstream. This region of the country encompassing western Iowa, eastern Nebraska, Missouri, Kansas and South Dakota saw an estimated 48.4 million acre-feet of runoff come down the river between March and July of 2011, 20 percent more water than during the flood of 1881 — the worst case scenario that the reservoirs and dams on the upper reaches of the river were built to control.

The Missouri River Mainstem Reservoir System is managed to protect those of us downstream from the level of flooding we endured in 1881 (the record flood at the time of construction). But hundreds of homes and businesses were under water in 2011. The Army Corps of Engineers insists that the flooding that occurred in 2011 was a 500-year flood. I, like many Iowans, have lived through too many 500-year events to fall for that line. We're bracing for another flood that could strike again at any time.

Since the 2011 flooding began, I've worked tirelessly to advance a simple proposal, H.R. 2942, directing the corps to manage the reservoir system to protect us from a repeat of last year's flooding. Think of the reservoir system as a series of six interconnected bathtubs. If the bathtubs are full, the corps must release water through the dams or drains. In order to hold the runoff from melting snowpack and heavy spring rains, the bathtubs cannot be completely full going into the spring runoff season. My proposal would require that there be enough room in the bathtubs to hold the additional amount of rain and snow melt we saw in 2011. Another way to prevent flooding is to increase the river's channel capacity so that in the event the discharge from the dams needs to be at a high level, the river can still hold the water.

Some of the hardest hit by the 2011 flood are the farmers whose businesses and livelihoods sit in the flood's path, and so the House Agriculture Committee acted. Last week, I introduced an amendment to the 2012 farm bill, which directed the secretary of agriculture to support efforts, like mine through H.R. 2942, to bring added flood protection to the Missouri River basin by

recalculating the amount of space within the reservoir system that is allocated for flood control storage using the 2011 flood as the model, rather than the 1881 flood. My amendment was adopted by the committee.

Hopefully, the farm bill will be brought to the House floor for consideration sometime in the coming weeks. When it is, my Missouri River amendment will be a part of it, to give those who live, work and farm in the Missouri River basin the peace of mind they deserve and the confidence they need to begin putting their lives and livelihoods back together. In the absence of such action, they will continue to find it very difficult to justify doing so.