

SPORTS

Chiefs GM talks but little about Peters Sam Mellinger 1B



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# THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

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## Ruling on floods blames Corps of Engineers

■ A Federal Claims Court ruling finds that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, meaning to protect wildlife, caused or contributed to flooding and property loss along the Missouri River. The case began in Kansas City.

BY MATT CAMPBELL  
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A long-standing dispute over flood control versus wildlife protection along the Missouri River hit a milestone with a court ruling that says the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers caused flood losses for property owners.

In a ruling unsealed Tuesday, a Federal Claims Court judge agreed with plaintiffs who sued the federal government, claiming that the Corps' policies favored wildlife protection over their economic interests.

A second phase of the case will look at whether the property owners are entitled to any compensation from the government. Still, they considered the first step a major victory.

"Today is the day the plaintiffs have patiently waited for and have fought for during the past four years," attorney R. Dan Boulware of the Kansas City-based law firm Polsinelli said in a statement.

The lead plaintiff among 372 farmers, landowners and business owners over six states is Roger Ideker of Ideker Farms in St. Joseph.

"As a farmer and landowner who has experienced substantial losses from these floods, I'm extremely pleased with this outcome," Ideker said in a statement. "It rightfully recognizes the government's responsibility for changing the river and subjecting us to more flooding than ever before."

The public affairs office of the Corps of Engineers headquarters in Washington did not immediately return a call.

A volunteer for the Missouri Chapter of the Sierra Club, who has followed the arguments in the lawsuit, said the plaintiffs wrongly think their interests in flood protection supersede all other considerations in river management.

"Now they are asking for



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Diana Garbison, right, and Danielle Foster, center, lead a group of students on Wednesday from Lincoln College Prep school during a walkout and march to City Hall to protest gun violence in schools.

## Lincoln Prep students take walkout straight to City Hall

BY MARÁ ROSE WILLIAMS  
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Lincoln College Preparatory Academy students had a clear message for Kansas City Wednesday morning.

"No more guns," they shouted through the streets of the city.

About 80 students from the Kansas City Public School District walked out of school just

before 10 a.m. along with thousands of other students in the Kansas City metro area and in schools across the country to protest gun violence and call for the nation's leaders to pass stricter gun laws.

"Kids are dying because of gun violence and we are frustrated," said Danielle Foster, one of the two student leaders who organized the Lincoln walkout.

Foster said the Lincoln students, like students across the

country on Wednesday, were standing in solidarity with students who survived the Valentine's Day mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla. Seventeen students and teachers were killed by a 19-year-old gunman who entered that school wielding a semi-automatic AR-15 rifle.

The Parkland shooting launched a gun control move-

“  
KIDS MY AGE DIE  
EVERY YEAR BECAUSE  
OF GUN VIOLENCE. ...  
WE ARE PASSIONATE  
ABOUT THIS.

Danielle Foster

SEE WALKOUT, 2A



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## Woman charged with murder in officer's death

BY IAN CUMMINGS  
AND MAX LONDBERG  
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Tammy Dee Widger was charged on Wednesday with felony murder in the shooting death of Ryan Morton, a Clinton police officer killed in the line of duty last week.

Widger, whose rental home was the site of the fatal shooting, had previously been charged with possession of methamphetamine with the intent to distribute and with



Tammy Widger

The second-degree murder charge was added by Henry County prosecutors on Wednesday in an amended complaint, according to court records.

Widger allegedly committed felony murder because Morton was shot and killed "as a result of the perpetration of the class C felony of delivery of a controlled substance," according to court records.

# school safety bill after Fla. shooting

BY MATTHEW DALY AND KEVIN FREKING  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON

The House overwhelmingly approved a bill to improve school safety Wednesday, the first gun-related action by Congress since the shooting that left 17 dead at a Florida high school.

The bill authorizes \$500 million over 10 years for grants to improve training and coordination between schools and local law enforcement and help identify signs of potential violence before they occur.

Lawmakers approved the bill, 407-10. It now goes to the Senate, where a similar measure is being considered.

House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., said the bill "provides a multi-layered approach" to identify threats so authorities can stop violence before it occurs.

"Tragic violence has no place in our schools. Every American believes that," Ryan said. "This legislation will actually take concrete action to prevent that."

The vote came as the FBI announced it is doubling the number of supervisors assigned to review

tips received from the public about possible threats of mass shootings or other violence.

Deputy FBI Director David Bowdich told a Senate committee that the agency "could have and should have done more" to investigate information it received prior to the Feb. 14 massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla.

The FBI received at least two credible tips that the suspect in the Florida school shooting had a "desire to kill" and access to guns and could be plotting an attack, but agents failed to investigate.

"While we will never know if any such investigative activity would have prevented this tragedy, we clearly should have done more," Bowdich told the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The Senate panel was considering a similar proposal to improve school safety, but a hearing Wednesday focused on law enforcement failures in Florida. Besides the FBI lapses, Broward County, Florida Sheriff Scott Israel has said his office received more than 20 calls about accused gunman Nikolas Cruz in the past few years. Sen. Charles Grassley,

she authored expired in 2004.

"This Congress cannot continue to do nothing, because nothing means more lives are lost, including the youngest and the most vulnerable among us," said Feinstein, the senior Democrat on the Judiciary panel. "High school students are literally begging us to take action to get these guns off the streets and out of our schools."

As Feinstein spoke, hundreds of students were rallying outside the Capitol to urge stricter gun control laws. The rally was part of a nationwide school walkout to protest gun violence following the Florida attack. A larger rally is planned March 24.

Chloe Appel, 15, of Gaithersburg, Md., held a sign that said, "Fix this before I text my mom from under a desk." The high school student said she's hopeful that Congress will enact gun control laws.

"After today and after the next protest Congress will see how many people feel strongly about this so they will have to make a change," she said.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders told the students that young people again are leading the nation, as they did during the civil rights and anti-war movements.

"All across the country people are sick and tired of gun violence, and the time is now for all of us together to stand up to the NRA and pass common-sense gun legislation," Sanders said.

FROM PAGE 1A

## RIVER

taxpayers to pay for their damages and forgo any other use of the river," said Caroline Pufalt of St. Louis. "(They say) recreation doesn't matter. Fish and wildlife don't matter. You need to do everything to protect us from flooding."

The Sierra Club was not a party to the lawsuit.

The plaintiffs estimate their flood losses at more than \$300 million going back to 2007. The court ruled that the Corps changed its flood management after 2004, in response to wildlife protection pressures, and made flooding worse.

But the court ruling was not a complete victory for the property owners. It did not find the government responsible for severe 2011 flooding. The Corps said flooding that year was unavoidable.

The basis of the lawsuit is the Fifth Amendment prohibition against the government taking private property without compensation.

The 259-page ruling, by Senior Judge Nancy B. Firestone in Washington, follows a complex trial that began in Kansas City before moving to Washington and included testimony from more than 95 witnesses and more than 3,250 exhibits. More than 20 million documents

were produced in the first phase.

Her ruling said recurrent flooding in the Missouri River Basin will continue under current management systems as drainage of land along the river is impeded by higher water.

The river is 2,341 miles long from Three Forks, Mont., through Kansas City and on to St. Louis, covering over 530,000 square miles.

The river was naturally wide and shallow, meandering across the floodplain and providing a variety of habitat for wildlife. Flooding was fed by rainfall in the Plains and mountain snow melt.

In the early 20th century the federal government determined the river should be controlled to aid human settlement and economic development. That was achieved and regulated with a series of dams and reservoirs.

The Missouri River Basin is now controlled by six main dams with a storage capacity of 73.1 million acre-feet. It became fully operational in 1967 and is the largest reservoir storage system in the United States.

Under federal law the river is to be managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is to capture and release water

by balancing flood control, navigation, water supply, irrigation, power, recreation, water quality and wildlife preservation.

The plaintiffs argued that the Corps changed management policies, reducing the emphasis on flood control in favor of returning the river to a more natural state to provide additional spawning and breeding areas for threatened species.

The Corps has been under pressure for decades to better protect troubled species, such as the pallid sturgeon, but it denied changing the rules enough to cause unanticipated flooding.

Based on expert testimony, the court found those changes after 2004 did cause water levels "to rise higher than they would have risen without these changes and that this rise ... has led to more flooding or more severe or longer flooding than would have occurred had these changes not been made by the Corps."

U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt, Republican of Missouri, issued a statement saying steps need to be taken in the wake of the court ruling.

"I hope this decision is the first step in a new direction for the Corps," he said. "I look forward to working with my colleagues to ensure the river is managed in a way that prioritizes flood control, while balancing other interests."

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