Bonnet Carre Spillway on the Mississippi River: opened to prevent flooding

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12 November 2026: The Bonnet Carre Spillway in Louisiana was opened to ease rising Mississippi River levels; the US Army Corps of Engineers has also reiterated the need for a sill below New Orleans to block saltwater intrusion. Around the same time, all 180 people aboard survived after a tanker hit a cruise ship on the river.

About the Mississippi River

Status: The longest river in the United States and the second longest in North America; it lies entirely within the US.

Source and course: Rises at Lake Itasca in Minnesota and flows almost due south across the continental interior.

Major tributaries: The Missouri River (from the west) and the Ohio River (from the east); it empties into the Gulf of Mexico through a vast delta southeast of New Orleans.

Length and basin

Length: The Mississippi alone is over 3,700 km; with the Missouri system, the Mississippi-Missouri is the world's fourth-longest river system - after the Nile (6,693 km), the Amazon (6,436 km) and the Yangtze (6,378 km).

Basin: A drainage area of 1,260,000 square miles - the largest in North America; home to cypress-dominated wet forests, brackish and freshwater marshes, sandy beaches and salt marshes.

Bonnet Carre Spillway and saltwater intrusion

The spillway: A control structure upriver of New Orleans; it diverts excess water toward Lake Pontchartrain to protect the city from flooding.

Saltwater intrusion: When the river's flow weakens, Gulf saltwater pushes upstream, threatening drinking-water sources; hence the renewed call for an underwater 'sill' below New Orleans.

Quiz: Test your knowledge

Q1: Consider the following statements about the Mississippi River: 1. It originates at Lake Itasca in Minnesota. 2. It empties into the Gulf of Mexico. 3. It flows through both the United States and Canada. How many of the above statements are correct?

(a) Only one(b) Only two(c) All three(d) None

Answer and explanation: (b) Statements 1 and 2 are correct. Statement 3 is wrong - the river lies entirely within the United States.

Q2: By length, where does the Mississippi-Missouri rank among the world's river systems?

(a) First(b) Second(c) Third(d) Fourth

Answer and explanation: (d) After the Nile, Amazon and Yangtze, the Mississippi-Missouri is the world's fourth-longest river system.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

In short: The Mississippi is the longest river in the US (Lake Itasca to the Gulf of Mexico); with the Missouri it is the world's fourth-longest system; the Bonnet Carre Spillway was recently opened to ease rising levels.

Question: Where does the Mississippi River originate?

At Lake Itasca in Minnesota; it empties into the Gulf of Mexico via a delta southeast of New Orleans.

Question: What is the Bonnet Carre Spillway?

A control structure upriver of New Orleans that diverts excess water toward Lake Pontchartrain to protect the city from floods.

Question: Why is saltwater intrusion dangerous?

When river flow weakens, Gulf saltwater pushes upstream, threatening the drinking-water sources of coastal cities.

Sources:

WBRZ: Bonnet Carre Spillway opened to ease Mississippi River levels (12 November 2026)

NOLA.com: What to know about Mississippi River cruise-ship crash (14 November 2026)

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