

"A River Basin of Opportunity, A Century Plus of Commitment"



ORVA NEWS

Ouachita River Valley Association

"Dedicated to Quality of Life in the Ouachita Valley"

FALL 2020

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ORVA is non-profit organization engaged in the development of projects that have been proven to be economically and environmentally justified that enhance the welfare of the people in the Ouachita River Basin in Arkansas and Louisiana.

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Fall 2020

OUACHITA-BLACK RIVERS NAVIGATION PROJECT

The year 2020 has been (and remains) extremely difficult for the people of the Ouachita River Basin and the rest of the Nation! With the daylight savings time change, the Pastor of my local church commented that he wasn't sure if he wanted to "fall" back and experience another hour of 2020. Me either!

The COVID challenges prevented the Association from visiting our Congressional delegations in Washington, DC and executing a much-needed convention which would have provided critical information for our membership and afforded necessary networking opportunities.

In this issue, we discuss dredging, funding, the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2020 and an update from Colonel Robert Hilliard, Vicksburg District Commander and District Engineer. As you know, the Vicksburg District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is our principal partner on the Ouachita-Black River Navigation Project. We have a strong working and professional relationship with Col. Hilliard and members of his staff and maintain weekly contacts with key members of the staff.

Also included is the Association's Statement to the Mississippi River Commission and their response, information pertaining to the \$28M Ouachita River Bank Stabilization & Levee Rehabilitation Project (referred to locally as the Monroe Floodwall Project), several positive economic stories affecting the Ouachita River Basin, and a message concerning recruiting and retention.

No doubt we've all been touched by the challenges of 2020. We anticipate, are hopeful for, and pray for a better year ahead.

2020 Dredging

No funding was appropriated in the FY 20 President's Budget or Work Plan for dredging. High water once again affected dredging operations and contributed to another short construction (dredging) season on the Ouachita-Black. (Columbia came out of water late May and Jonesville later in June.) The good news story was that funding in the amount of \$2.5M was received in the FY 2020 Supplemental. With those supplemental dollars we were fortunate, through solid engineering and financial management, that the Corps was able to conduct additional surveys and dredge greater area than originally planned. What initially appeared to be a tough year for dredging actually ended up looking very positive for the project.

Dredging at "hot spots" on the Ouachita-Black commenced on August 12, 2020. A snapshot of dredging operations conducted this past construction season is depicted here:

Location	River Mile	Dredging Period
Railroad Bridge	114	3 Days
Columbia Lock	114.5	3 Days
Blue Cane	17	3 Days
Jonesville Lock	25	3 Days
Shiloh Shoal	217.5	4 Days
Below State Line	220	4 Days
Coffee Creek	222.7	2 Days
Crossett Harbor	235.5	2 Days

In total, 140,694 cubic yards of material was dredged in 35 days (including travel) on the Ouachita-Black. In addition, due to the high water, clearing and snagging operations were conducted in earnest and at last report, still ongoing. As of November 7, these operations were conducted as far north as River Mile 294, with more than 150 snags removed. We are hopeful that we will not experience another high-water season but that almost appears to be the norm.



May 29, 2020 picture of Jonesville Lock and Dam with water beginning to recede. The top of the lock walls are 42'

2021 Dredging Outlook

The funding outlook for dredging for 2021 looks pretty bleak. As Maj. Gen. Holland (President, Mississippi River Commission) notes in her response to ORVA, the Ouachita-Black Navigation Project will receive only \$500,000 in the fiscal year (FY) 2021 budget. This amount only allows enough funds to dredge from the mouth of the Black River up to the Jonesville Lock and Dam. Considering mobilization (start-up) costs of between \$1.2M - \$1.8M for dredging, the Association is hopeful for possible funding carry-over or supplemental. No funds were appropriated for backlog maintenance or any Prioritization of Maintenance items for FY21.

Considering this small amount of dredging dollars earmarked for the Project, it represents little enticement for shippers and customers. To exasperate the situation, little dredging, if any, occurs on the Ouachita within the state of Arkansas, as we noted in the above paragraph. Many consider the river within Arkansas to be of little value to shipping, focusing instead purely on tourism and recreation. In our letter to Congressman Westerman (representing Arkansas' Fourth District), the Association is working closely with the Arkansas Waterways Commission to bring attention to the issue of lack of dredging on the Ouachita in Arkansas. We are continually asked about dredging on the Ouachita in Arkansas.

The Association did learn of one potential positive for FY21. There remains the possibility that the Vicksburg District will receive an older dredge (which has been determined as excess property by the Corps) for operations on the Ouachita-Black Navigation Project. This potential – the Dredge Dubuque – is the last of the “cutter-head” dredges operating in the Corps of Engineers arsenal. We are hopeful that the dredge will be staffed and in operation at the beginning of the calendar year should the possibility come to fruition. We'll know more as we continue liaison and coordination with the Vicksburg District.

Another high-water event on the Black-Ouachita will further complicate matters for the 2021 dredging season, not only the required dredging but the clearing and snagging operations that come with rising and falling water. These events, as you know, yield short construction (dredging) seasons that brings with it additional needs and requests for funding.

These high-water years not only affect river operations, but also create negative environmental issues, such as the loss of timber on the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission's (AGFC) Beryl Anthony Wildlife Management Area and other areas that are experiencing hydrological problems along the river. We learned during Ms. Jennifer Sheehan's (with the AGFC) testimony at the August 26, 2020 Mississippi River Commission's Public Meeting, that there is a need for a Ouachita River Watershed Study. The study was one of the recommendations to Congress in the 2015 Lower Mississippi River Resource Assessment. The study will no doubt rank as a higher priority for the Corps. ORVA supports the effort to initiate this study and will join others as Ouachita River Basin partners in this effort.

Level of Service

On November 15, 2015, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began operating the locks at Felsenthal and H.K. Thatcher five days per week, Monday through Friday, 10 hours per day with no weekend service. The decision was made to reduce the operating hours based on a

Corps review of usage on the Ouachita-Black. This review, based on criteria outlined in the Levels of Service Regulation, limited, or reduced, lock operating schedules. The Ouachita-Black Navigation Project has been determined, based on the number of metric tons passing through their locks, as a low-use waterway. As we've seen in previous reviews, the Project has seen a reduction in tonnage over the past several years. With the reduction in tonnage comes the reduction in lock operations.

Although we are on pace to surpass previous tonnage records of the last several years, we're not sure if that is enough to reestablish multiple shift operations. Certainly, maintaining 24-hour operations at the Louisiana locks is critical as operations in the southern region of the waterway are where the great majority of shipping traffic is moving on the system. We are hopeful that commercial traffic will return on the upper portions of the river.

The ORVA Executive Director joined representatives from the Arkansas Waterways Commission and Ms. Diedre Smith of Inland Rivers Ports and Terminals (IRPT) on September 23, 2020 to meet with Mayor Julian Lott, members of his Administration, concerned citizens and business and civic leaders to discuss port operations in Camden, Arkansas. The purpose of the meeting was to develop a plan to reenergize operations at the Port of Camden. The attendees explored the potential for requesting a grant, potential customers, and what is required for a commercially navigable waterway (which is the basic requirement for grant monies). This is a never-ending cycle: with dredging comes customers, with customers comes waterways usage – lock operations and the movement of tonnage, with operations and tonnage comes funding resources and the potential for increased lock operations, which in turn leads to potential customers.

Commercial Tonnage

With the emergency closure of the Columbia Lock, the Ouachita experienced a steep drop in 2018 and 2019 tonnage. The Association anticipated an increase in tonnage with the reopening of the lock in 2019. The reopening has slowly shown signs of increase. We also anticipated the COVID-19 crisis of 2020 would have some negative play in tonnage numbers. However, there is no solid data to support this claim. But, as reported in the Spring 2020 Newsletter, we believe we are on pace to meet or surpass 2017 tonnage levels.

With the movement of grain from the 2020 fall harvest combined with a steady flow of fuels and thousands of tons of rock for the Monroe River Bank Stabilization and Levee Rehabilitation Project (the Monroe Floodwall Project) tonnage has increased overall from previous years.

Add the impacts of the 2020 Supplemental for dredging, a resurgence in the national and regional economy, an anticipated COVID vaccine (already being touted), and the potential increase for commercial tonnage on the upper portion of the waterway, we believe we will see an increase in commercial tonnage in 2021 and beyond. The year 2020 may in fact, be a banner year for tonnage on the river. Perhaps it is the beginning of a river recovery.



M/V Mark M pushing rock barges to Monroe July 16, 2020 to be staged for the rock project along the floodwall in Monroe.

The numbers presented in the graphs below represent “Upbound” and “Downbound” tonnage (reflected in thousands of tons) on the Ouachita at the Jonesville Lock for the 2020 year to date. The Jonesville Lock and Dam is selected because it is a good representation of tonnage on the river.

Jonesville 1/1/20-4/6/20				
Commodity	Upbound	Downbound	Current Total	Total YTD
Gasoline Incl Aviation (Except Jet)	47.000	3.000	50.000	50.000
Residual Fuel Oil	38.400	3.000	41.400	41.400
Fertilizers	6.400		6.400	6.400
Limestone	12.800		12.800	12.800
Agricultural (Soybeans/Corn)		12.800	12.800	12.800
Other	.452	.538	.990	.990
Total	105.052	19.338	124.39	124.39

Jonesville 4/7/20-8/31/20				
Commodity	Upbound	Downbound	Current Total	Total YTD
Gasoline Incl Aviation (Except Jet)	60.800		60.800	110.800
Residual Fuel Oil	67.000		67.000	108.400
Fertilizers	6.400		6.400	12.800
Limestone	177.600		177.600	190.400
Agricultural (Soybeans/Corn)		49.600	49.600	62.400
Other	6.936	3.957	10.893	11.883
Total	318.736	53.557	372.293	496.683

Jonesville 9/1/20-10/30/20				
Commodity	Upbound	Downbound	Current Total	Total YTD
Gasoline Incl Aviation (Except Jet)	38.400		38.400	149.200
Residual Fuel Oil	32.000		32.000	140.400
Fertilizers				12.800
Limestone	179.200		179.200	369.600
Agricultural (Soybeans/Corn)		112.000	112.000	174.400
Other	* 20.389	4.755	* 25.144	* 37.026
Total	269.989	116.755	*386.744	*883.426

* Includes 19,200 Tons of Sand and Gravel

Using current estimates of 14,000-15,000 tons of rock (~ 9 barges) placed weekly for the Monroe Floodwall Project, we should easily reach the 1M ton mark on the river by the close of the calendar year. The project is estimated to be completed by July 2021 with (using these estimates) another 214,000 tons of rock placed in 2021.

2020 WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT (WRDA 2020)

The Association had the opportunity to review and provide comments to the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works concerning America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2020 (AWIA 2020). The AWIA 2020 will be used as a basis for the WRDA 2020 in the Senate.

In its comments, ORVA noted that AWIA 2020 addresses the language that ORVA seeks as outlined in Title I, Subtitle B, Section 1204, specifically Items 3 and 33. Section 1204 requires that the Secretary provide assistance to the applicable non-federal stakeholders associated with the studies or projects during the Corps outreach required under section 7001(b) of WRDA 2014. Items 3 and 33 are shown as:

3. Modification of the project for navigation, Ouachita-Black Rivers, Arkansas and Louisiana, authorized by section 101 of the River and Harbor Act of 1960 (74 Stat. 481) to include water supply as an authorized purpose.

33. Modification of the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project authorized by the first section of the Act of May 15, 1928 (45 Stat. 534, chapter 569) to include the portion of the Ouachita River Levee System at and below Monroe, Louisiana, to Caldwell Parish, Louisiana.

In follow-on conversations with the staffs of our congressional delegations, they are very optimistic that this language will remain in the legislation. Special thanks to U.S. Senator John Boozman and his staff, as the majority member of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, who fully supported the language in the draft legislation and continues the fight on our (the people of Arkansas and Louisiana) behalf. All of our congressional delegations in fact were supportive; they understand the importance of this legislation to the people of the Ouachita River Basin.

Thanks to the pandemic protocol, the Supreme Court hearings and confirmation, the Presidential election, the stimulus back and forth, and other national crises, WRDA 2020 has been in a holding pattern between the committee and the senate leadership. As a staffer noted, “It is our understanding that the House and Senate had an informal conference over the August recess, and if the rumors are true, we have an agreed upon bill and will be fighting for floor time before we leave for the year in late December.” Another staffer noted, “the usual Senate calendar has been completely thrown to the wind.” That said, no meaningful legislation has passed. He also said, “I am optimistic that we’ll see some movement on the WRDA front following (the election), lame duck session or otherwise.”

ORVA has fought long and hard for this language and will continue to push to have water supply as a project feature. Water Supply from the Ouachita River continues to grow in its importance in not only sustaining the current, but is essential in the future economic development and role in improving the quality of life for the residents within the Ouachita River Basin and region.

(Please note the Statement to the Mississippi River Commission in subsequent pages.)

Funds Status

The table below represents the President’s Budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 and 2021. The FY 21 figures below represent a starting point in the budgetary process. As Colonel Robert Hilliard, Vicksburg District Commander and District Engineer discusses in his article, funding for FY 21 has increased slightly since FY 20. As noted in Maj. Gen. Holland’s November 10, 2020 letter to the ORVA Executive Director, the Project will receive only \$500,000 for dredging which is well below the Association’s \$3.3M conservative estimate needed for that activity.

Tonnage and river usage play a huge part in funding. With the increase in tonnage (due in large part to the thousands of tons of rock needed for the Monroe Floodwall Project) we anticipate an increase in funding in the out years. The Association is confident that the Vicksburg District has the interests of the Ouachita-Black at heart and will do all within their power to lobby for and obtain the necessary funding for the project. However, nothing is guaranteed; with a new Administration (should that indeed be the case), only time will tell what funding and what the budgetary picture will look like in the future.

President’s Budget for Fiscal Years 20 and 21
For the Army Corps of Engineers Civil Works Program

Fiscal Year (FY) 2020

Category	Operations	Maintenance	Total
Blakely Mountain Dam/Lake Ouachita, AR	6,954,000	904,000	7,858,000
DeGray Lake, AR	5,546,000	1,602,000	7,148,000
Narrows Dam/Lake Greeson, AR	4,516,000	1,216,000	5,732,000
Ouachita and Black Rivers, AR & LA	5,511,000	1,828,000	7,339,000

Fiscal Year (FY) 2020
FY 20 Work Plan
Additions

Category	Operations	Maintenance	Total
Blakely Mountain Dam/Lake Ouachita, AR	529,000		8,387,000
DeGray Lake, AR	237,000		7,385,000
Narrows Dam/Lake Greeson, AR			5,732,000
Ouachita and Black Rivers, AR & LA	30,000		7,369,000

FY 2021

Category	Operations	Maintenance	Total
Blakely Mountain Dam/Lake Ouachita, AR	7,043,000	1,342,000	8,285,000
DeGray Lake, AR	4,368,000	2,237,000	6,605,000
Narrows Dam/Lake Greeson, AR	4,273,000	1,578,000	5,851,000
Ouachita and Black Rivers, AR & LA	5,875,000	1,750,000	7,625,000

2020 Crappie Masters National Championship Tournament on the Ouachita

An invasion took place on the Ouachita River at Monroe, Louisiana for a massive, two-day crappie fishing event held between Friday, September 25th and Saturday, September 26th. Sponsored by Bass Pro Shops, Crappie Masters is perhaps the most competitive and recognizable crappie fishing tournament trail in the country with the national championship the largest event of the year.



A field of over 100 boats took to the water for the tournament in what can be described as the ultimate fishing championship, though numerous anglers fished solo in the tournament.

Many of the fishermen for the event commented that fishing on the river was considerably different than fishing for crappie from a lake. The differences were hardly noticeable, however, as there were plenty of impressive fish caught over the weekend.

Alabama's Eric Cagle, one of those solo fishermen, battled Tropical Storm Beta and rising water on the Ouachita, to take the \$30,000 championship with an impressive 14 fish limit weighing in at 28.81 pounds.

The Arkansas team of Dustin Harris and Kelley Graham netted a two-day weight of 27.93 pounds good for the \$12,000.00 second place prize and an additional \$2,000.00 for having the big fish of the tournament, a 2.74 pound Ouachita River dandy.

Oklahoma 's Robert Carlile, who wound up weighing in 27.36 pounds over the two days, took home a check for \$6,200.00 which led to the third place win. He also garnered \$7,500.00 and a set of Power Poles with Drift Paddles for his Angler of the Year win.



Ending up in fourth place was the team of Heath Rogers and Lance Billberry who weighed in a 14 fish two-day weight of 26.97 pounds and collected \$5,000.00 for their efforts.

Rounding out the top five was the Millennium Marine team of Tony Hughes also fishing by himself bringing in 26.22 pounds and winning \$4,400.00.

ORVA Congressional Visits

A primary objective of the Association is to maintain collaborative relationships with our elected officials. To that end, ORVA representatives meet with Congressional members from Arkansas and Louisiana, and key representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on a semi-annual basis. Due to the COVID pandemic, ORVA's leadership was unable to visit with our Congressional delegations this fall. ORVA has, however, maintained close relationships with these key representatives and members of their staffs. With a vaccine (hopefully) on the near horizon, ORVA's leadership anticipates visiting our Congressional members in the Spring of 2021. There is much to do and with many of the congressional actions of this past summer complete, we can move forward with promoting the development of water and land resources projects that benefit the people of the Ouachita River Basin.

Camden and South Arkansas' First Microbrewery



Camden welcomes **Native Dog Brewing**, a craft brewery, the brainchild of Bobby and Lauren Glaze. Bobby Glaze revealed this exciting business venture back in August this year to members of the Camden Lions Club. A Pharmacist, Bobby (who is a native of Camden) first began brewing his own beer before he was legally able to purchase it.

While in Pharmacy School he began perfecting his brew, noting that, "brewing beer is just one big science project." As to the brewery's name, Bobby told the story of how they fell in love with this scruffy little dog that came into their lives while on rotation at a pharmacy on an Indian Reservation in South Dakota. It was there they rescued the brewery's namesake: "Baxter."

Native Dog Brewing will be a pet friendly, community atmosphere and offer something for everyone. Besides a great tap selection (including Ouachita Amber), they will offer crafted sodas and root beer for children and non-alcoholic beverages. “It’s a place where everyone can come and spend time, whether it be with their kids, family, friends, or pets.” Bobby also noted, “Everyone who walks through the door will feel like a native of Camden.”

As for the actual brewing, Bobby said a crucial ingredient is located near the brewery itself: the waters of the Ouachita River. The river also provides another key component in the Native Dog experience; patrons will have a full view of the Ouachita River.

Native Dog Brewing plans to open early December or possibly as early as late November. “We’re not a bar, we’re a brewery,” explained Lauren, “it definitely has a different connotation.”

Comments from Vicksburg District Commander and District Engineer, Col. Robert Hilliard

Relationships are the cornerstone of any successful partnership. At the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Vicksburg District, we pride ourselves on being the “Best Partner in the Valley,” a nod to our commitment to building relationships that help us better understand the people and projects we serve. We certainly have no better relationships than those with our great partners along the Ouachita River, from the reservoirs in Arkansas down through Louisiana where the Black meets the Red. We collaborate with communities like Hot Springs, Arkadelphia, and Camden in Arkansas and Monroe and Jonesville in Louisiana on issues such as water supply, recreation, hydropower, and navigation. Every year, nearly 750,000 people visit USACE recreation facilities on the Ouachita-Black Navigation Project, and over 700,000 tons of cargo move along the waterway. The USACE Vicksburg District understands the massive impact of these industries for the communities along the Project, and we are committed to doing our part to keep the entire system running.

The Ouachita-Black Navigation Project includes 337 miles of navigation channel that is 100 feet wide and at least nine feet deep. The project begins 41 miles south of Jonesville, Louisiana, and continues northward through central and north-central Louisiana and south-central Arkansas to Camden. Four locks and dams with lock chambers measuring 84 feet wide and 600 feet long are in operation on this waterway. Annual operation and maintenance for the Ouachita-Black total approximately \$10.7 million, and we have operated at less than 80% of optimal funding the past few years. Lake Ouachita, DeGray Lake, and Lake Greeson are the three flood control reservoirs in Arkansas operated by the USACE Vicksburg District. Located in the Ouachita Basin, these reservoirs also provide beautiful camping and recreation areas, water supply to nearby municipalities, and hydropower. Fiscal Year 2021 began Oct. 1, 2020, and funding for the Ouachita Basin lakes has increased slightly since last year.

The importance of phenomenal partnerships comes into sharp focus as it pertains to maintaining both structures and navigation along the system. The ability to candidly communicate with our partners across the project so we can fully understand both local desires and system needs are integral to prioritizing maintenance and repairs while obtaining critical funding. These objectives do not happen by accident; they are orchestrated through careful, consistent conversation among the project’s key stakeholders.

Throughout much of 2019, the upper portion of the Ouachita-Black was closed to navigation due to the repairs at Columbia Lock and Dam. The Ouachita-Black reopened to navigation upstream of Columbia Lock and Dam in August 2019. Well pumps were installed to reduce the uplift pressure from the upper pool when the chamber pool level is at lower pool. Since these repairs were completed, there have only been a few delays in service due to issues with the well pumps. Overall, the lock and dam is in good condition and continues to operate as designed.

Dredging on the Ouachita-Black is crucial to maintaining navigation. The Dredge Allison Crosby dredged eight locations on the Ouachita-Black in Fiscal Year 2020, including: Blue Cane, Jonesville Lower Approach and Lock Chamber, MM 114 Railroad Bridge, Columbia Lower Approach, MM 200, MM 219, MM 220, and the Crossett Harbor entrance. Funds were not provided in the Fiscal Year 2020 President's Budget, so this dredging was completed using supplemental funds from the FY19 high water event. Looking forward into Fiscal Year 2021, the President's Budget provided only enough funding to dredge to Jonesville Lock and Dam. Other funding options are under review to complete the necessary dredging, and we intend to award an FY21 maintenance dredging contract in March 2021. This effort is especially important due to the rock needed to stabilize the bank below the Monroe Floodwall.

In 2012, the Tensas Basin Levee Board requested the USACE Vicksburg District inspect the Monroe Flood Wall for joint spalling, which is the cracking, breaking, or chipping of joints or cracked edges and is often caused by moisture. We inspected the wall and installed instrumentation to detect and monitor movement.



Lonnie Dunn and Col Hilliard at the Monroe Floodwall Project.

The spalling and cracking continued to worsen and move down the wall, and it was determined that the bank must be stabilized with rock before fixing the floodwall.



We awarded the contract for the bank stabilization in late August 2018; however, the closure of Columbia Lock delayed the construction until January 2020. The project entails the placement



of 609,000 tons of rock to stabilize the bank by the flood wall and will require approximately 400 barges of rock. The project will continue into July 2021.



Placing rock at the bank stabilization site on the Ouachita River.

While flood risk management is the primary purpose of our reservoirs along the Ouachita River in Arkansas, we know how important their recreation Component is for local communities. To

that end component is for local communities. To that end, we continuously look for ways to upgrade our facilities to provide the best experience possible for our visitors. One example is the Joplin Recreation Area at Lake Ouachita. In October 2019, Natural Resource Management Staff, Operation and Maintenance Staff, and contractors with Redesigned Business Solutions began campsite renovations at Joplin Recreation Area. This work involved redesigning access roads and campsites to provide easier access for visitors, removing and relocating overcrowded sites, relocating sites in flood prone areas, and establishing a tent-only area with electrical service and potable water. The staff worked through the fall and into spring and completed renovations on 25 campsites. The goal was to complete 31 total sites, but the remaining sites will be rehabilitated in the fall of 2020 due to COVID-19. Campsites were enlarged and leveled with a defined impact area. They were also fitted with a new fire ring, grill, table, potable water, and upgraded electrical service. Visitation numbers indicate that Joplin Recreation Area's attendance increased 30-35% following the campground renovation.



Redesigned Camp Site at the Joplin Recreation Area at Lake Ouachita.

Bank stabilization is required up and down the river. The 2016 Ouachita River Rehabilitation Project consists of five sites along the Ouachita River Levee south of Monroe Louisiana that were damaged during the 2016 flood. The USACE Vicksburg District received emergency P.L. 84-99 funding to repair bank caving caused by the flood. First, we gathered project information report details and developed a report that was approved by the USACE Mississippi Valley Division, our higher headquarters. Once approved, we requested data collection and design funds to design a project that consisted of bank stabilization and levee setback work. Finally, a construction contract was awarded to Riverside Construction Co., Inc. from Vicksburg, Mississippi, in July 2020. Construction has begun at the four construction sites, and work is expected to be complete in late FY21.



One of the 2016 PL 84-99 bank stabilization repair sites on the Ouachita River.

The 2018 PL 84-99 Ouachita River Rehabilitation Project consisted of nine sites along the Ouachita River Levee south of Monroe, Louisiana, that were damaged during the 2018 flood. The USACE Vicksburg District has received funding for a geotechnical investigation and design to fix the damaged sites along the Ouachita River Levee. Two contracts for these repairs will be advertised in the summer of 2021.

We appreciate the opportunity to share a few of our updates with you, and we are excited to continue and grow our partnerships across the Ouachita River Valley. Together, we can solve anything. We look forward to being your “Best Partner in the Valley.”

Standard Lithium Begins Operations in El Dorado



Standard Lithium, an innovative technology and lithium project development company, marked the beginning of operations on September 21, 2020 with a “virtual” ribbon cutting ceremony with many Arkansas leaders in attendance. The company is a first of its kind in the world. The direct lithium extraction plant will be used for proof-of-concept and commercial feasibility studies. “We’ve taken it from our first

venture into El Dorado in 2017 to now having an operating plant, the first of its kind anywhere in the world to do this,” CEO of Standard Lithium Ltd, Robert Mintak said. The Lithium Stirred Tank Reactor (LiSTR) pilot plant is installed at the project partner LANXESS’ South Plant facility in El Dorado, Arkansas. This direct lithium extraction technology is an environmentally friendly technology that selectively extracts lithium ions from tail brine that is a by-product of existing bromine production facilities run by LANXESS in south Arkansas. The process eliminates the use of evaporation ponds, reduces processing time from months to hours, and greatly increases the effective recovery of lithium.

The commercial production of battery grade lithium, which is a key component in large scale lithium ion batteries, is a crucial raw material for the desired expansion of electric mobility. Arkansas’ 4th District Congressman Bruce Westerman commented, “we’re going to be making high quality lithium from Arkansas, a product that is in huge demand as we become more electrified around the world and in our country.” U.S. Senator John Boozman stated, “Standard Lithium’s investment will benefit the community, the region, and the State of Arkansas.”



Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson commented, “this technology has the potential to put Arkansas on the global map for lithium, a critical mineral for the United States economy.” U.S. Senator Tom Cotton noted, “this cutting-edge technology could one day make America a leading producer of lithium...the lithium produced by this plant will power the products of advanced industries from smart phones to electric cars.”

Just 10 minutes from El Dorado in Union County, Mr. Mintak noted, “it (the LiSTR plant) only works because we’re in El Dorado. You have trained highly skilled operators because of the brine and oil and gas industry. You have all the other aspects like the infrastructure that’s the backbone of those existing industries,” Mintak said.

“Water is always critical. El Dorado has been wise in how it has split the town water use from the industrial water use. That was great forethought,” Mintak said. Although Standard Lithium is a small user of Sparta aquifer groundwater, that groundwater would not have been available to the company had Union County not developed the alternative industrial surface source from the Ouachita River 20 years ago. Three major industries converted in whole or in part to the lightly treated Ouachita River water, allowing the once-threatened and rapidly Sparta aquifer to begin recovering. In the years since, groundwater levels have risen dramatically. Declining as much as 7’ per year in the late 1990s in Union County, a Sparta groundwater monitoring well’s water level has now risen over 109’ since 2004 when the three major industries, including LANXESS’ Central Plant, began converting from Sparta groundwater to Ouachita River water.

“So with the contractors, Gulf Coast related industries, access to water, supplies, reagents, low-cost power, and the broader ecosystem of an oil/gas and chemical industry; no place in the world do you have a lithium resource like that. El Dorado is unique in that way,” Mintak added. “We wouldn’t have been able to do it anywhere else in the planet with the speed and scale that we have.”

Ouachita River Bank Stabilization & Levee Rehabilitation Project

The Corps awarded a contract for bank stabilization in late August 2018 and began work in January 2020 – delayed due to the emergency closure of the Columbia Lock. The Project, officially titled the Ouachita River Bank Stabilization & Levee Rehabilitation Project, Miles 161 & 167, is referred to locally as the Monroe Floodwall Project, although not many area residents are aware of the project.



The contract was awarded to Luhr Brothers, Inc. Founded in 1939 and incorporated in 1948, Luhr Bros., Inc. is one of the largest and most well-respected marine contractors in the country and work extensively with the Army Corps of Engineers.

The value of the contract is a whopping \$28,117,000.00 with an estimate of 609,000 tons of stone to be placed. As of November 10, the project is 52% complete with 326,172 tons of “A” stone placed. The contractor estimates an additional 201,000 tons of rock will be required for Mile 161. This amount of tonnage is equivalent to ~ 400 Barges. As Col. Hilliard mentioned in his article above, the scheduled completion date for the project is July 2021. The project is on schedule with rock steadily moving up the river.



The Vidalia Area Office, Vicksburg District, US Army Corps of Engineers is administering the contract. The purpose of the project is to stabilize portions of the Ouachita River embankment to prevent bank erosion and caving. Opposite the

project site is the Hawes Street Pump Station and residential areas located at Pargoud Drive and Carolina Street. The project is funded under the auspices of the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project. USACE has major maintenance responsibility on the MR&T Project levees and structures. Maintenance of project channels, major maintenance of

structures, and major maintenance of the project levees are federal responsibilities while minor maintenance of the levees and structures are non-federal sponsor responsibilities.

ORVA was instrumental in influencing the passage of the Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA) of 2007 which added 1.9 miles of floodwall at Monroe to the MR&T Project. The WRDA 2007 did not reinstate the lower 63 miles of the east bank from Monroe south where the majority of erosion and damage occurs. The Association continues to address this issue and will continue to work this critical issue. Earlier in the year, ORVA provided draft comments to the current legislation – WRDA 2020 – namely the modification of the MR&T Project to include the portion of the Ouachita River Levee System at and below Monroe, Louisiana, to Caldwell Parish, Louisiana. As addressed in our August 2020 Statement to the Mississippi River Commission (included below in its entirety), we believe the potential exists for calamitous levee system failure.

Ouachita Water Sweep 2020



Ouachita Water Sweep 2020 kicked off at 8:00 AM on Saturday, September 19, 2020. With trash bags in hand, more than 100 volunteers mounted boats and kayaks armed with trash bags for the annual water clean-up day. Besides the Ouachita River, volunteers cleaned up Bayou Desiard, Cheniere Lake, and Darbonne Lake. Tires, tents, bottles, plastics, and other trash were cleaned out of these local bodies

of water. Volunteers also picked up trash along the Ouachita River levee and beneath the bridge.

“It just makes your heart feel good, it shows people really care about our community. There were a lot of youth and a lot of children, so they are learning about the environment, learning about the importance of keeping things clean,” said Staci Mitchell, Mayor of West Monroe.

Officials estimated the sweep netted anywhere from 3 to 5 thousand pounds of litter. They want to remind our community that everything thrown out can end up in one of our beautiful waterways and how important it is to keep them clean.



Statement presented to the Mississippi River Commission

On August 25, 2020, Mr. David Weeks, Executive Director of the Ouachita River Valley Association (ORVA) presented a statement and testified in person to the Mississippi River Commission in Greenville, MS. Attendees were greatly limited due to the coronavirus pandemic. Social distancing and other safety precautions were observed during the testimony of the invited participants. Following are excerpts from the statement:

General Holland and Members of the Mississippi River Commission:

I am David Weeks, Executive Director of the Ouachita River Valley Association (ORVA). It is an honor and privilege to present this statement on behalf of our Association.

The Association has been in existence for more than 127 years and has a proud record of longevity, achievement, and service. Organized in 1893 as the Ouachita River Improvement Association, its sole purpose was to obtain year-round commercial navigation on the Ouachita River in Arkansas and Louisiana.

In 1950, this nonprofit organization was renamed the Ouachita River Valley Association. Operating within two distinct areas, the upper Ouachita River Basin primarily within the State of Arkansas (20 counties) and the lower Ouachita River Basin, primarily representing Louisiana (17 parishes), it represents the private sector of the economy and serves as an advocate for individuals and organizations, public and private, that comprise the constituency of these communities. The Association is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of three officers and seven directors from each state.

The major focus of our Association is on the operation, maintenance, and completion of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project and associated infrastructure. However, it also greatly supports the economic development of projects throughout the Ouachita River Basin.

Our comments in this statement outline ORVA's major focus areas, interests, and concerns and follow this general outline:

- Navigation
- Water Supply – Municipal, Commercial, and Agricultural
- Recreation and Conservation
- Wastewater Discharge
- Flood Damage Reduction

The intent of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project is to provide year-round commercial navigation which extends from the mouth of the Black River to Camden, Arkansas, a distance of some 330 river miles. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers currently maintains four locks and dams on the Ouachita River, each having a lock chamber of 84 feet wide and 600 feet in length. The navigation channel is maintained to a nine-foot navigation channel and a 100-foot width to accommodate barge traffic.

An estimate of annual needs for the Project is roughly \$10.7M in Operations and Maintenance, which has no inflationary adjustment. This conservative estimate represents the minimum annual requirement for the current project.

- \$3.3M for Dredging
- \$1.6M routine Maintenance of the waterway
- \$4M for lock operations
- \$1.8M for recreation

The President's Budget for the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project has tracked a downward trend over the past several years. Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 funding was \$8.1M. Initial FY 2017 funding represented \$8.4M. Thanks to Congressional support, an additional \$2M was added in FY 2017 for dredging operations. No doubt based on the previous fiscal year, FY 2018 funding amounted to \$10.5M. Fiscal Year 2019 totaled \$7.9M, and FY 2020 amounted to \$7.3M. While no funds were appropriated in the President's Budget or Work Plan for FY 2020, the Association is greatly appreciative of the \$2.3M for dredging in the FY 2020 Supplemental. As of the date of this Statement, the dredge Allison Crosby is currently at work near Mile 44 on the waterway. The President's Budget for FY 2021 currently projects funding slightly higher at \$7.6M with none earmarked for dredging.

The Association greatly appreciates the Commission's continued efforts to express capability for dredging, maintenance, lock operations, and recreation for the Project. Like compounded interest, however, backlog maintenance (currently estimated at more than \$10M) continues to grow with each successive budget year.

We understand the Corps' reduction in hours of operation for the locks and dams due to the declining tonnage on the river. We also understand the correlation between dredging dollars and declining tonnage (shipping) on the river. However, with minimum (or no) dredging, barge traffic is sometimes stopped or halted due to barge damage or grounding. As we've indicated above, the President's Budget for FY 2021 has no dredging dollars earmarked for the Project. This represents little enticement for potential shippers and greatly affects the economic picture of the area.

The Ouachita-Black Rivers once enjoyed a 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days per year operation as directed by law. Felsenthal and Thatcher are currently open only 10 hours a day, five days per week. The Association's position is that the Project should be operated as authorized at a full level of service. Limited hours of lock operation may lead to delays which drive up the cost of shipping, again offering limited enticement for potential shippers.

The Association believes it highly critical and therefore fully supports ongoing legislation to add water supply to the language of the Water Resources and Development Act. The Project provides a dependable source of water for municipal, industrial, and agricultural use along its entire length and is becoming an increasingly important component of the River. Several municipalities depend on the Ouachita to provide water supply to residents, to include Monroe and Sterlington, Louisiana and Camden, Arkansas.

Along with municipal water supply is industrial water supply for multiple firms within the Ouachita River Valley. These users also depend on maintaining an adequate pool depth to sustain operations. Union County, Arkansas, for example has a 65 million gallon-per-day capacity intake and industrial water treatment plant on the Ouachita. Completed in 2003, the infrastructure serves the largest electric generating plant in Arkansas, and irrigates a golf and residential community, the grounds of El Dorado High School and a private citizen's recreation area.

Industries and irrigation customers use Ouachita River water as an alternative to the once threatened and rapidly declining Sparta groundwater aquifer, which until 2003 was Union County's only source of drinking and industrial water. In 1997, Union county was using 21 Million Gallons per Day (mgd) of Sparta aquifer groundwater. Today, Union County uses 15-18 mgd of Ouachita River water and 7-8 mgd of Sparta aquifer groundwater. In response, the aquifer, which in 1997 was declining as much as 7 feet per year in parts of Union County, has risen 100 feet as of April 2020.

These Union County, Arkansas' industries and others are highly dependent on the level of the river, and as we discuss below, locks and dams sustain in that level. With a drop in river levels, production at these facilities would be at substantial risk. In fact, Union County, Arkansas' electric generating plant has no other source of water and one of Union County's three industries was able to expand only because of the abundant source of surface water available from the Ouachita River.

Irrigation for agricultural use continues to grow as an evolving use of the river. Thousands of acres of agricultural fields, primarily those areas south of Monroe, Louisiana, are becoming more and more dependent upon Ouachita water for irrigation. Irrigation, as you are aware, greatly increases the value of the agricultural commodity product at harvest.

The Association greatly supports the Corps' recreational areas along the Ouachita-Black Rivers and its tributaries. Combined with other recreational areas managed by state, local, and private entities, visitors provide a huge economic impact to the communities within the Ouachita River Basin. The three Corps lakes: Ouachita, DeGray, and Greeson, are an integral part of the Hot Springs community and economic system, and a huge component of Arkansas' tourism product. To fully support the necessary backlog maintenance of these Corps lakes, additional resources are needed. Fiscal Year 21 capability is estimated at \$46M.

Construction of the Lake DeGray Field Office (the last remaining facility to be replaced at the Vicksburg Districts Arkansas Lake Projects) and Interpretive Visitor Center is greatly needed. This project, for one reason or another, has been backlogged for more than ten years. Construction of this field office (with conservative estimates of between \$4.8-5M), combined with upgrades to the Corps campgrounds, is an important investment that will pay huge dividends and add to the economic well-being to the people of Arkansas.

Wastewater discharge is a fact of everyday life. Several key factors play a role in this process: namely volume and flow, which aid in the dilution of wastewater. Although nature plays the primary role, the level of the river (and its flow) can be controlled by the Corps' locks and dams. Should the locks and dams not be maintained (i.e., water levels not adequately

maintained), the amount of water treatment will require a greater capital expenditure from entities and businesses, equating to greater costs for area residents. The cost of maintenance, therefore, is often overlooked with far reaching second and third order effects.

Flood damage reduction is of paramount importance to ORVA. The Ouachita River levee system is closely associated with navigation, especially south of Monroe, Louisiana, as it provides flood damage reduction. We are greatly concerned with bank caving and other erosion problems on the Ouachita and Black Rivers in multiple areas. We are pleased with the approval to repair multiple bank caving sites through the PL 84-99 program.

The Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA) of 2007 included language restoring 43 miles of the upper east bank, 1.9 miles of floodwall in Monroe, Louisiana, and 7.2 miles of levee on the west bank of the Ouachita River Levees Project as part of the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project. The WRDA 2007, however, did not reinstate the lower 63 miles of the east bank from Monroe south where the majority of erosion and damage occurs. The Association provided draft comments to the legislation, namely the modification of the MR&T Project to include the portion of the Ouachita River Levee System at and below Monroe, Louisiana, to Caldwell Parish, Louisiana. The Association believes there is an increased possibility for levee system failure which will lead to potentially catastrophic results.

The Ouachita River contributes substantially to the growth and economic development of the entire Ouachita River Basin with nearly \$5.7B in annual economic activity, with commercial use returning roughly \$1.2B in income to households in Arkansas and Louisiana. Additionally, all commercial use of the river is linked to nearly 21,000 full-time jobs for Arkansas and Louisiana residents. The Project is more important than ever to the welfare and economic success of the Basin.

In summary, the Association's major concerns are:

- Lack of funds for dredging and backlog maintenance, to include the three Corps lakes
- Adding water supply as a feature of the Navigation Project
- Modifying the Project to add bank stabilization as a Project feature
- Placing the lower 63 miles of the east bank of the Ouachita River levee to the MR&T Project
- Construction of a new Lake DeGray Field Office and Interpretive Visitor Center

Thank you for the opportunity to present this statement to the Commission. We also thank the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, specifically the Vicksburg District, for their professional and working relationship with the Association. We look forward to a continuance of this great relationship as we work together to further the development of water and land resources projects which greatly support the people and communities of Arkansas and Louisiana.

“Has the lower 63 miles of the Ouachita River ever been in the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Program?”

At the conclusion of the presentation to the MRC, Commissioner James asked, “if the lower 63 miles of the Ouachita River – south of Monroe, Louisiana to Caldwell Parish, Louisiana – had ever been in the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Program?” (During the testimony, Mr. Weeks asked for support to “restore” that portion of the Ouachita River to the MR&T Program.)

At one point, the 63 miles did, in fact, fall within the umbrella of the MR&T Program. This issue has been contentious for years (and a priority for the Association). Several historical and official documents do exist that reference that portion of the river as part of the MR&T Program. However, over the course of several years (if not decades), through various legal and often ambiguous interpretations, that portion of the river was removed from the program.

The removal of those 63 miles placed the burden of maintenance on the Tensas Basin Levee District which lacks the resources to provide the necessary upkeep.

In the written response to the MRC in the attempt to answer the question, Mr. Weeks noted that he was unsure if he could accurately capture the issue in a white paper or similar document and explain in detail all the actions that got us to where we are currently. He noted that an in-depth discussion of the evolution of the 63 miles in question, from inception, to removal, to requested restoration, is definitely warranted. He also noted that the Association would, at the request of the Commission, make available those personnel for discussion who have the historical and requisite knowledge of the events leading to the inclusion and removal of that portion of the river from the Program.

The goal of ORVA all along has been to restore, or reinstate, the lower 63 miles of the east bank of the Ouachita from Monroe south to where the majority of erosion and damage occurs.

Response to the Statement Presented to the MRC from ORVA

The Association received the Mississippi River Commission’s response in a letter signed by Maj. Gen. Diana Holland, President of the Commission on November 10, 2020. General Holland addressed several of the concerns we expressed during the testimony and in the Association’s Statement. Her response, addressed to Mr. Weeks, ORVA Executive Director, is presented here without edit:

Thank you for testifying before the Mississippi River Commission on August 26, 2020, during the Public Meeting held in Greenville, Mississippi.

The Commission is aware that the Ouachita-Black Navigation Project received \$500K in the fiscal year (FY) 2021 President’s Budget, which is only enough to minimally dredge the Black River up to Jonesville Lock and Dam and that no funds were appropriated for backlog maintenance or any Prioritization of Maintenance items for FY21.

We recognize the importance of the Ouachita River as a source of water supply and commend you on the success of the water storage agreements executed for the DeGray Lake and the City of Hot Springs' water supply projects. These projects demonstrate the achievability of water security in the Ouachita Valley. The Commission encourages you to continue to work with the Vicksburg District and your congressional delegation regarding your desire to include water supply as a project purpose of the Ouachita River. With respect to your desire for placing the lower 63 miles of the Ouachita River's east bank levee into the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project, we encourage you to work with your delegation as such a change would require Congressional action.

Thanks for your support of recreation on the Ouachita River. As you are aware, the number two industry in Arkansas is recreation and the three Arkansas lakes contribute a significant economic benefit to the local communities. As for the DeGray Lake Office, the Vicksburg District is committed to providing a suitable facility for the employees at Degray Lake.

Addressing your concerns about bank caving, the repair of 11 bank caving sites along the Ouachita River have been approved through the PL 84-99 program. Of the 11 sites, a contract has been awarded by the Vicksburg District to repair five sites with anticipated completion in the fourth quarter FY21. The remaining six sites are currently in the planning phase with an anticipated contract award in the fourth quarter FY21.

The Commission appreciates receiving your comments and looks forward to hearing from you at future meetings.



Mayor Staci Mitchell of West Monroe, Louisiana fishing at a Celebrity Fishing Day. The Ouachita River provides excellent opportunities for fishing in both Arkansas and Louisiana.

55th Annual Convention

The Association's Board of Directors made the heartbreaking decision to cancel its 55th Annual Convention which was to be held at the West Monroe Convention Center, West Monroe, LA. The Convention, hosted by the City of West Monroe and supported by numerous

sponsors, was originally planned for August 20-21, 2020. As this date neared and the COVID crisis continued unabated, the Board considered pushing the convention further to the right, possibly early to late fall. Board discussions also included conducting a “hybrid” convention which would include “on-line” and “pre-taped” presentations intermingled with the “in-person” presentations at the Convention Center.

With social distancing requirements, limited networking opportunities, and food service problematic because of the virus, the Board made the critical decision to postpone the event until 2021. We anticipate next board meeting discussions to include a decision to conduct the event in the spring or early summer 2021. Weather should cooperate better (considering the heat of August) and a vaccine (hopefully) available. We welcome your thoughts and comments.

ORVA Membership Opportunities

Like any successful organization, the Ouachita River Valley Association is focused on membership retention and recruitment. The strength of ORVA is its membership.

As we discussed earlier in this newsletter, the Association leadership makes two visits to Washington, DC to meet annually with congressional members representing the Ouachita River Valley in Louisiana and Arkansas. We are an Association of constituents of our elected congressional representatives. And like other organizations, numbers speak volumes. Competition for Federal funding is very competitive in today's environment, and the strength of our voices must be heard. To that end, our congressional representatives understand that we speak for our members; we are greeted with open arms, intent on hearing our issues, needs and support. The bottom line is this: their interests are ours – to promote the development of water and land resources projects that enhance the general welfare and economic well-being of the people in the Ouachita River Basin.

There are many reasons for joining ORVA – the Ouachita River Valley Association:

- the Association has a tremendous heritage and a record of accomplishments since its organization in 1893.
- the Association is recognized by Congress, Federal, and State Agencies as the lead organization that promotes and supports the development of water and land resources projects throughout the Ouachita River Basin.
- the Association is recognized by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and considered by their premier District in Vicksburg as the “best partner in the Valley.” ORVA maintains a highly productive and professional relationship with the Commander and staff of the Vicksburg District.
- the opportunity to participate in annual inspection trips on the Ouachita-Black and Mississippi Rivers with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (when funds are available) and see firsthand how valuable our water and land resources are.

- stay informed on the water and land resources development in the Ouachita River Valley through receipt of newsletters, media releases, and the ORVA website. Board members meet quarterly.

- Associate, network, and socialize with good “down-to-earth” common sense folks who want to ensure the economy, environment, and quality of life for residents of the Ouachita River Basin are improving on a continuous basis.

We anticipate the mailing of dues notices for 2021 in early December. Current membership consists of members in the following categories: individual, small business, corporate, civic/professional, public entity, and primary users with dues ranging from \$50 for an individual membership to \$2,500 for primary users. We strongly believe every elected local, state, and federal official, business owner, civic-minded professional, and anyone interested with the economic development of the Basin should be a member of the Association.



This monster Alligator Gar was arrowed on the Ouachita River. It measured 7’10” in length and weighed a whopping 225 pounds. The Ouachita River affords many opportunities for recreation.



Invite a friend to become an ORVA member.

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