

"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"

SPRING 2021

MISSION:

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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Spring 2021

OUACHITA-BLACK RIVERS NAVIGATION PROJECT

We are finally done with 2020! The Nation is rebounding and hopefully on the verge of a full recovery. Hopefully we will all soon resume somewhat normal activities. But what will the "new" normal look like?

In this issue we discuss dredging, funding, budget, an update from the Water Resources Development Act of 2020 (WRDA 2020), a welcome message from Maj. Gen. Diana Holland, Commander, Mississippi Valley Division and President, Mississippi River Commission, an introduction to Mayor Crystal Marshall, ORVA's newest Board member, updates on several projects, information on the three Corps lakes associated with the Ouachita River, ORVA's Statement to the Mississippi River Commission this past April, and several other articles of interest to ORVA's members.

The Association is planning and preparing for its Annual Conference which will be held in West Monroe, LA at the West Monroe Convention Center. Several opportunities for networking and exchange of ideas will be available as well as the opportunity to gather information and learn from several keynote presentations. A program is planned followed by dinner with speaker on Thursday evening, August 12. August 13 begins with a hot breakfast followed by a bevy of speakers and a luncheon with keynote speaker. All in all, the Board anticipates a meaningful and productive conference. You will be sure to calendar August 12 and 13, 2021 on your schedules. Of course, the conference would not be complete without an opportunity to participate in the annual raffle, which helps support ORVA's development, operation, and maintenance of water resource projects within the Ouachita River Basin in Arkansas and Louisiana.



Message from MG Holland, Commanding General, Mississippi Valley Division and President, Mississippi River Commission

In the past year that I've been in command, I've come to appreciate more than ever the importance of the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project and its value to the nation.

What I've already gleaned the most in this short time is that through inspection trips, public hearings, and our partners and stakeholders – is the unity and deep ties to the region.

I've now had an opportunity to meet with partners throughout the valley to include mayors, levee board members, contractors, and community members to gain a better understanding of what we can do to continue improving the system.

The Mississippi River Commission, whose charge is to prosecute the MR&T Project and oversee the most important waterway in America, is a one-of-a-kind organization, unique to our country, and the envy of other nations.

From 1928 – 2010, Congress invested \$13 billion in building, operating & maintaining the MR&T Project. This system no longer relied on levees only for protection, but includes reservoirs, backwater areas, and floodways, which are all designed to take pressure off levees during major floods. The MR&T system also includes 2,216 miles of mainstem levee, of which 90% are constructed to approved grade & section. Channel Improvements, consisting of revetment, dikes, dredging and cut offs are also integral to the system.

The MR&T system is one of the world's most comprehensive and successful flood control and navigation systems. Unique to the lower Mississippi River Valley, the MR&T system provides protections not afforded anywhere else.

I've been fortunate, despite the pandemic, to conduct site visits of projects and meet with federal, state and local partners.

The Mississippi River Commission has a proud heritage that dates back to 1879, when Congress established this seven-member team to remake the Mississippi River into a reliable commercial artery while protecting adjacent farms and towns from its powerful floods.

While protecting 4.5 million people, the MR&T has prevented \$1.54 Trillion in flood damages, since 1928. That's a 95 to 1 return on each dollar invested in the system.

The MRC has helped to make hundreds of improvements to the MR&T system over the last 80 plus years and those improvements helped prevent more than \$249.4 Billion in damages in 2019 alone.

The 1.25 million-square-mile greater Mississippi River drainage basin gathers water from 41% of the continental United States. This includes all or parts of 31 states and two Canadian provinces.

I am proud to command the Mississippi Valley Division and serve as the President of the Mississippi River Commission.

City of Hot Springs Lake Ouachita Water Supply Project

The Association reported to the Mississippi River Commission in its April 2020 Statement, the initiation of an important water supply project. The City of Hot Springs, Arkansas' **\$110 Million Lake Ouachita Water Supply Project** is moving forward. The Corps' Vicksburg District has been engaged and responsive to the City's needs for the project.

In an exciting culmination of years of planning to provide a generational supply of water to the citizens of Hot Springs and the area, on June 16, 2020, the City's Board of Directors issued \$110 million in Waterworks Revenue Bonds to provide funding to construct new water supply assets – the intake structure, water plant, raw water main and potable water main.



In addition to completing the goal of funding for this major project, City staff continued to make significant progress on the water supply project despite the challenges of 2020.

On Nov. 17, 2020, the Board passed a resolution awarding a contract to Crist Engineers, Inc. for construction management and inspection services relating to the Lake Ouachita Water Supply Project Task Order No. 28 of the Master Services

Agreement. The funds will be broken down into three projects: raw water transmission line, estimated total of \$36,746,153; water treatment plant, estimated total of \$24,750,000; and finished water transmission line, estimated total of \$17,118,375.

By the beginning of 2021, many of the easements necessary from the Corps of Engineers had been secured, and several easements needed for the raw and potable water mains had been acquired. Two water main construction projects – \$4.8 and \$4.4 million – had also been contracted. Preliminary design of the water plant had been completed.

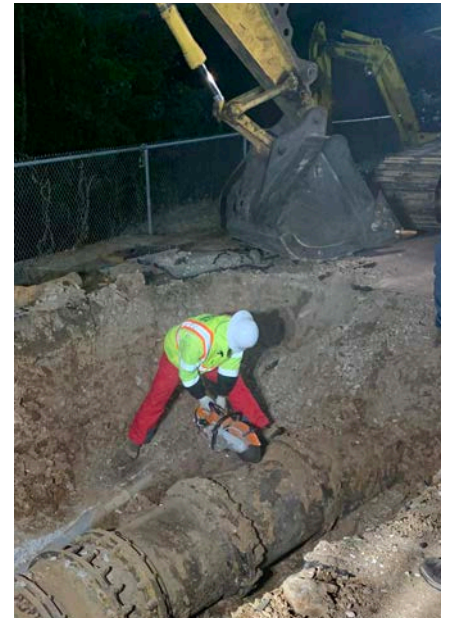


On March 2, 2021, the Board awarded a contract for \$19,270,000 to Michels Corporation for design and construction services for the intake structure and tunnel through Blakely Mountain. Preceding the RFQ process, geotechnical core samples were collected by boring into the mountain, which began in August 2019. These samples aided in determining the type of tunneling method and proper tooling needed for the machinery.



By the middle of March, the route had been cleared for the first of five construction contracts and the first sections of 48-inch welded steel pipes had been installed for what will be the 17-mile raw water line connecting the Lake Ouachita intake site to the new 15 million gallon a day water treatment plant off Amity Road. In a separate project contract, a 36-inch ductile iron pipe (DIP) for the finished water transmission was approximately 40% complete, and two crews were installing around 300 feet a day along Albright Road from the new water treatment plant site

towards Central Avenue or Highway 7 South. The Lake Ouachita intake and tunnel design/build contractor, Michels Corporation, had started the permitting process with the Corps of Engineers and U.S. Forest Service, with the actual tunneling to start in approximately a year. The three stages of constructing the treatment plant off Amity Road will include grading, site work and fencing, followed by a clear well being built on the site, and finally the actual building of the plant itself.



The timeline for completion of the intake structure, water transmission mains, and water plant is 2023.

This project would not have been possible without the partnership of the Mid-Arkansas Water Alliance and the United States Corps of Engineers re-allocation agreement for Lake Ouachita. We thank them and the Ouachita River Valley Association for their support of our project.

Information and Photos courtesy of
Bill Burrough, City of Hot Springs

73rd Annual Crossett Riding Club Rodeo – June 2-5, 2021



The Crossett Riding Club PRCA (Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association) Rodeo was started in 1948 and has since become a tradition in Southeast Arkansas. Crossett proudly boasts one of the largest Grand Entries of any PRCA rodeo. The Crossett Riding Club Rodeo is part of the PRCA South Eastern Circuit and a participating rodeo in the PRCA's All American Pro Rodeo Series. The Crossett Riding Club PRCA Rodeo

brings NFR stock, top name cowboys and cowgirls, award winning specialty acts, and one of the top announcers in the PRCA to Cap Gates Arena for great rodeo action!

2021 Dredging

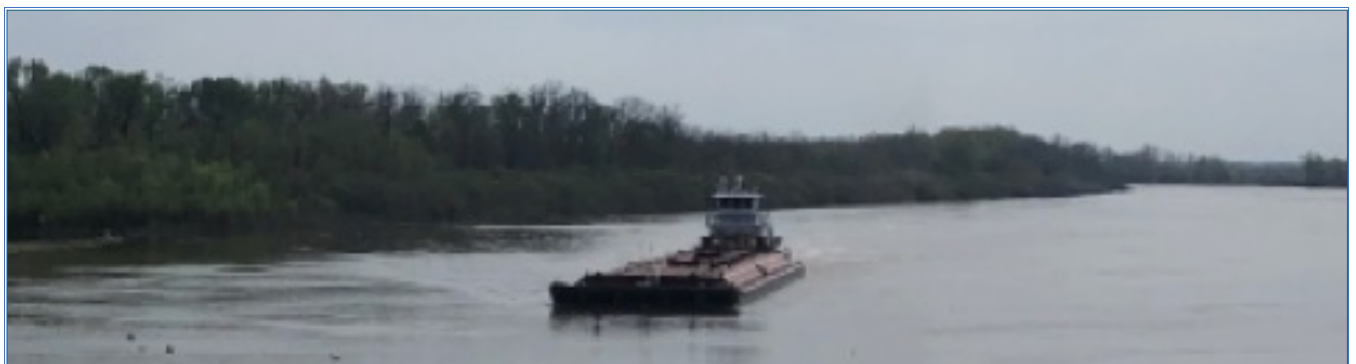
The dredging outlook for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 in terms of funding looked pretty bleak in the fall of 2020. Maj. Gen. Holland (President, Mississippi River Commission) noted in her November 10, 2020 response to ORVA that the Ouachita-Black Navigation Project would receive only \$500,000 in the FY 2021 budget. Considering mobilization (start-up) costs of between \$1.2M - \$1.8M for dredging, the \$500,000 dedicated for dredging was really a non-starter for the Project. Even when pooling resources, that amount only allowed enough funds to dredge from the mouth of the Black River to the Jonesville Lock and Dam. No funds were appropriated for backlog maintenance or any Prioritization of Maintenance items for FY21.

With this minimal amount for dredging, there is hardly any enticement for potential shippers on the river. And, to compound this issue, very little dredging occurs in the northern section of the Project, i.e., above the Louisiana state line. In fact, very little shipping occurs above Monroe, Louisiana. The Association will continue to work closely with both the Arkansas and Louisiana Congressional delegations to bring attention to dredging shortfalls in the upper region. From a Corps perspective (and from a purely economic perspective), a considerable amount of funding for dredging in the upper Ouachita nets very little payback to the economy of the region. We will discuss this more at the annual conference in August.

With the discussion in the preceding two paragraphs, ORVA recently learned (just as this newsletter was going to print) that the Ouachita-Black would receive ~45 days of dredging! A contract was just awarded to Inland Dredging for the Dredge “Kelly L” to begin on the Ouachita-Black and then transition to the Mississippi Harbors. Of course, operations depend on Mother Nature cooperating with the reduction in river levels.

With a contract now in place the Corps will begin profiling: identifying problem areas and conducting the necessary surveys. We can expect dredging to occur at the traditional “hot-spots” on the river. As we all know, high-water events complicate dredging operations with rising and falling waters. In the past several years, these high-water events created short dredging seasons. And, short seasons bring with it additional needs and requests for funding.

We are very thankful for the Corps and its dedicated professionals that help make this happen!



Tow approaching Navigation Pass at Jonesville Lock

Biden Nominates Michael Lee Connor, of Colorado, to be Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) to replace R.D. James



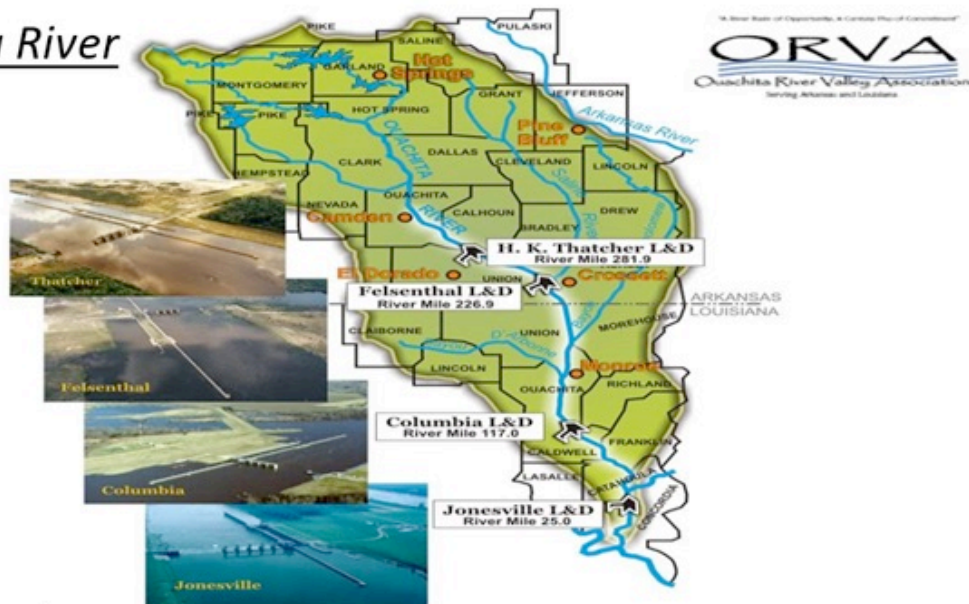
Michael Lee Connor

On April 27, it was announced that Connor, a Native American, would be the nominee to serve as the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, which oversees the Army Corps of Engineers and its huge network of dams and other projects. During the Obama administration, Connor was Deputy Secretary at the Department of the Interior and before that, Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation. With the administration's new focus on infrastructure, many in DC believe Connor would be instrumental in turning the President's climate rhetoric into action, believing that he will help the Army Corps fit into broader priorities like climate resilience and infrastructure.

Level of Service

The Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project once enjoyed a 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days per year operation as required by law. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on November 15, 2015, 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. This reduction in service decision was made based on a review of usage on the Project. This review, based on criteria outlined in the Levels of Service Regulation, reduced lock operating schedules at Felsenthal and Thatcher because of the continued reduction in metric tons of cargo passing through them. It is a "cause and effect" relationship that delves into the economics of shipping.

Ouachita River Basin



*A River Basin of Opportunity...
A Century Plus of Commitment*

Ouachita-Black Navigation Project

Tonnage numbers for calendar year 2020 have surpassed 1 million metric tons (the standard point for determining whether the waterway is a mid or low-use waterway). That said, the vast majority of tonnage on the Project is south of the Arkansas state line. In fact, substantial tonnage is due to the movement of rock for the Monroe River Bank Stabilization and Levee Rehabilitation Project (known locally as the Monroe Floodwall Project which is discussed later in this newsletter). Considering this information, we are unsure if 24-hour operations will resume at the two northernmost lock and dam systems.

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 occurs. We are hopeful that commercial traffic will return on the upper portions of the river. It is, however, a complicated matter with economics as the major player.

Several variables are at work concerning the levels of service. The Association will conduct an in-depth discussion of this “cause and effect” relationship, among other things, during its annual conference. The Association’s position, all along, is that the Project should be operated at its required full level of service at all four lock and dam systems.

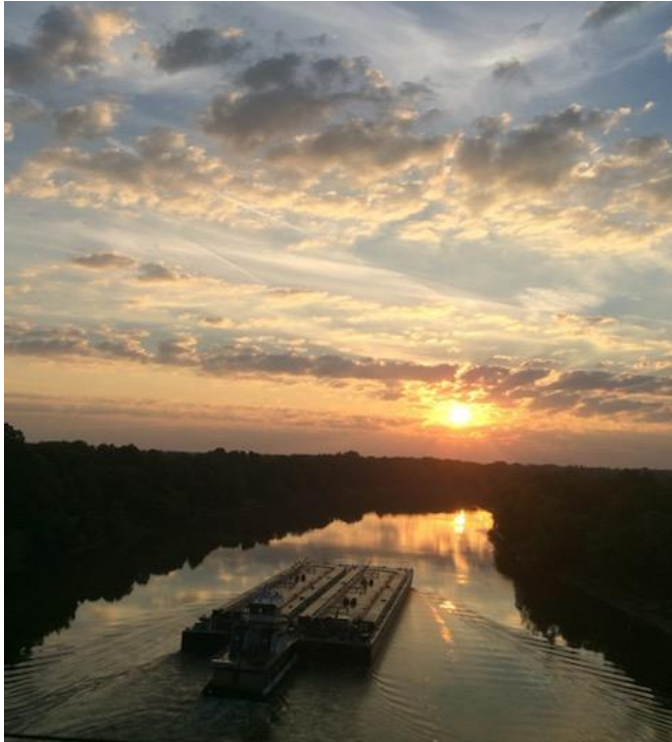


Photo Courtesy of Clay Manly

Commercial Tonnage

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 calendar year 2020. Data from the Jonesville Lock and Dam is selected because it is a good representation of tonnage on the river.

Jonesville 1/1/2020 – 12/31/2020			
Commodity	Upbound	Downbound	Total YTD
Gasoline Incl Aviation (Except Jet)	184.4	3.0	187.4
Residual Fuel Oil	163.0	3.0	166.0
Fertilizers	19.2		19.2
Limestone	561.0		561.0
Sand and Gravel	19.2		19.2
Agricultural (Soybeans/Corn)		208.0	208.0
Machinery/Bulkheads (Not Electric)	12.0	10.985	22.985
Other	.584	.024	.608
Total	959.384	225.009	1,184.393



Sunset on the Ouachita, Courtesy of Clay Manly. Taken from the RR Bridge at Columbia, LA

Water levels on the Ouachita have caused a delay in the movement of rock to the Monroe Floodwall Project which stands at 79% complete. The Corps estimates an additional 125,000 tons of rock will be placed on the project with a projected (assuming Mother Nature will cooperate) completion date later this summer. The Ouachita is currently at ~30 feet with current levels not predicted to reach 25 feet until late May-early June. The river must reach 25 feet and maintain that level; a moderate fall is preferred.

Assuming an additional 125,000 tons of rock moving upbound for the Project, anticipated tonnage for calendar year 2021 can be estimated at between 775-815 tons. When considering tonnage, several variables are at play. Certainly, the economic impacts of COVID are one of the primary considerations.

Funds Status

The Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project continues to face a lack of funds for dredging and backlog maintenance, to include the three Corps lakes. The Association estimates the minimum annual requirement for the Ouachita-Black Rivers Project to be \$10.7M in Operations and Maintenance:

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

Full funding allows for improved maintenance and increased river capacity/usage. The support and its efforts to express capability for dredging, maintenance, lock operations, and recreation for the Project.

The table below represents the President's Budget for FY 2021. The FY 21 figures below represent a starting point in the budgetary process. As Colonel Robert Hilliard, Vicksburg District Commander and District Engineer discussed in his article in the Fall 2020 Newsletter, funding for FY 21 has increased only slightly since FY 20.

President's Budget for Fiscal Year 2021
For the Army Corps of Engineers Civil Works Program

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

Late April, the White House sent Congress its initial \$1.5 trillion budget request for discretionary appropriations in fiscal year (FY) 2022. Known as the 'skinny budget,' the document provides the first glimpse of President Biden's spending priorities. The 58-page budget request is the first since 2013 that is not tied to spending caps, which Congress has implemented in the past to ensure discretionary defense spending and discretionary non-defense spending grow at approximately the same rate.

Overall, this initial insight to the President's request shows a 16% increase in non-defense spending to \$769 billion, while defense spending would see only a 1.7% increase to \$753 billion. We do have some initial understanding about the President's infrastructure spending priorities. Key infrastructure figures include:

\$25.6 billion for the Department of Transportation (DOT). This is a \$317 million increase from the FY21 enacted level providing a \$3.2 billion, or a 14% increase, for DOT discretionary programs.

\$11.2 billion for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This is a \$2 billion, or 21.3%, increase from the FY21 enacted level.

\$46.1 billion for the Department of Energy (DOE). This is a \$4.3 billion, or 10.2%, increase from the FY21 enacted level.

\$27.8 billion for the Department of Agriculture (USDA). This is a \$3.8 billion, or 16%, increase from the FY21 enacted level.

\$17.4 billion for the Department of Interior (DOI). This is a \$2.4 billion, or 16%, increase from the FY21 enacted level.

\$11.4 billion for the Department of Commerce. This is a \$2.5 billion, or 28%, increase from the FY21 enacted level.

Of critical importance to the Project, albeit the Corps as a whole, is **\$6.8 billion for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Civil Works Program.** This represents a **13% decrease** from the FY21 enacted level of \$7.8 billion. This cut to the Corps of Engineers is common in Presidential budgets, as they look to offset big budget increases elsewhere – such as those departments noted above.

The skinny budget does not reflect further details on the \$2.2 trillion American Jobs Plan or changes (increases) in taxation which is sure to come.

The President's annual budget (full budget) is typically released mid-February. Early indications had signaled the budgets release by the end of April. Still, some speculate that the budget will be delayed until the administration reaches some sort of "deal" with upwards of a \$6 Trillion infrastructure action. That said, we may not know what the full budget proposal is until summer, which is quickly approaching. The delay, what we already see in the "skinny budget", and the fight for infrastructure funding, does not bode well for the Corps, and ultimately for the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project.

We do know however, as discussed in the **2021 Dredging** section above, that what began with a meager \$500,000 allocated for dredging has now grown to about 45 days of dredging operations on the Ouachita-Black. We're unsure what FY2022 will look like in its final stages – especially for dredging operations. With a 13% decrease in funding forecasted in the President's "skinny budget" for the Corps' Civil Works Program, we are sure to take some sort of hit on the Project. How much reduction remains to be seen.

The Association has always conservatively estimated a \$3.3M need for dredging activity. With the new Administration, there is no guarantee for any level of funding. It (funding) definitely looks bleak in the out years. Only time will tell what funding and what the budgetary picture will look like in the future.

2022 Dredging

As noted above, the Corps' Civil Works Program will take a 13% reduction in funding from the FY2021 program. That reduction is sure to trickle down; dredging dollars have always been an issue for the Ouachita-Black. When asked, the Corps' Vicksburg District reminded us of several points: "1) the relatively low navigation usage of the system doesn't allow the system to compete well with other higher use systems, 2) the very low, near zero usage of the upper two locks limit the potential funding more, and 3) the District continues to request the needed dredging funds as we are aware the navigation users need a system that is reliable and meets the authorized dimensions." The District also noted their highest priority for the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project, "to maintain the Locks and Dams, pools, and authorized channels as intended (from a navigation perspective." Likewise, their biggest concern of the Project is "limited funding to address all the Projects' needs."



The Corps continues to express capability for dredging annually. Even when the funding outlook is bleak, the Vicksburg District works diligently to meet dredging needs and requests. For example, what started out in FY2021 as a dismal \$500,000 has now grown to ~45 days of dredging. We remain confident that the Association's needs and requests will be addressed, if not met.

Tow traversing navigation pass at Jonesville lock

We plan to explore dredging and other issues pertaining to navigation at our upcoming annual conference in West Monroe this August 12-13. We've placed considerable time on the agenda for discussion, briefings, and networking opportunities. As always, the Corps supports the conference with knowledgeable speakers and representatives. Make plans to attend and participate in this professional engagement.

Tensas Basin Levee District Hosts Meeting with Mississippi Valley Division Leadership



Mr. Stinger presents an information brief to Maj Gen Holland and staff

Maj. Gen. Holland, Col. Hilliard, and many of their Corps staffs visited with the Tensas Basin Levee District at their office in Monroe, LA on Feb 10, 2021. Mr. John Stringer presented an information brief which was well received. Mr. David Weeks, ORVA Executive Director was also privileged to attend and discuss issues pertaining to the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project.

36th Annual Buddy Bass Tournament – September 11, 2021

The Buddy Bass Tournament, which is in its third decade, has been an event with a tri-state draw to fishermen across the Ark-La-Miss region. Eager fisherman laced with voices of devoted volunteers come together to make this huge fishing event a success for this region. Over the past few years we have successfully turned out the well-orchestrated launch of approximately 80-90 boats. Many of the area’s best anglers and fishers of all ages spend the day fishing

the waters of the Ouachita and Saline Rivers in search of big bass. The day begins with a group of about 25-30 early morning volunteers



that begin launching the teams into the Crossett Harbor at about 4:15 AM, a good bit ahead of schedule! Fishermen depart for the respective fishing spots to await the 6:00 a.m. first cast. It is a sight to behold-resembling a ballet with boats!

As fishermen spend their day out in search of the “big bass”, the “worker bees” gear up for the big weigh-in which will kick off at 3 PM sharp. The group of about 30+ volunteers are ready, armed with scales, measuring sticks and tabulation sheets. The weigh-master serves as the “afternoon entertainment” with his precise weights of the fish.

With the weigh-in complete, the anglers eagerly await their totals. At the end of the day, the top fifteen winners are announced in the total weight categories along with the two biggest bass of the day. Last year’s winning team, Jonathan and Ben Brockwell, of Crossett, weighed

in at 18.35 lbs. The “Big Bass” winner was Grady Rinehart of Sterlington, LA with a bass weighing 6.75lbs.

Sparta Aquifer Revisited (Courtesy of Ms. Sherrel Johnson)

In 2002, the Union County (Arkansas) Water Conservation Board (Board), Union County taxpayers and landowners, Delek (Lion Oil) Refinery, El Dorado Chemical, Entergy/Union Power, and LANXESS/Great Lakes completed over \$65 million in infrastructure to save the rapidly depleting Sparta groundwater aquifer by providing a reliable and abundant lightly treated industrial surface source from the Ouachita River. These stakeholders rely on the abundant Ouachita River water supply above Thatcher for industrial use, electric generation, irrigation, and residential development.

The Board is permitted (by the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission) to withdraw an average of 50 mgd to a maximum of 65 mgd from the Ouachita River. Current draw is an average of 16-18 mgd. The infrastructure, however, is sized to meet current and future needs up to 65 mgd.

The once-threatened Sparta is recovering dramatically. Until 2002, Union County used 100% Sparta groundwater for industrial and drinking water, and all Sparta groundwater well levels were declining, some as much as 7' per year. In the late 1990s, the U.S. Geological Survey and Arkansas Natural Resources agreed – Union County must reduce its Sparta groundwater consumption by 72% - from 21 mgd to 7 mgd -- in 5 years or less, or risk irreparable damage to the aquifer. Today Union County uses an average of 7-8 mgd groundwater.

Groundwater levels in South Arkansas and North Louisiana monitoring wells have risen dramatically since industrial conversion began in 2004-2005; As of April 2021, one USGS real-time monitoring well's groundwater level has risen **116.7'** feet nearest the deepest cone of depression beneath El Dorado. The threat of and actual saltwater intrusion has also been halted.

The Board's current customers provide over 1,200 high-paying direct jobs creating nearly 3,000 jobs in the larger South Arkansas/North Louisiana region, and manufacture products essential to our national security and economy. In early 2017, fertilizer manufacturer El Dorado Chemical completed an \$800 million expansion that more than doubled its Ouachita River water supply demand creating an additional 45+ high-paying jobs.

Addressing the Sparta aquifer's decline by constructing infrastructure to deliver affordable, lightly treated industrial water from the Ouachita was and is primarily an economic development project designed for resilience, not recovery. Neither the industrial jobs, future growth, nor Sparta recovery would be possible without the Ouachita River and the volume of water above Thatcher, the uppermost lock and dam in the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation System.

The Board's most recent success is realizing water supply as an authorized project purpose which further protects the Sparta Aquifer in Union County. This would not have been possible

without the full support, leadership, and legislative skills of its Congressional delegation, steady direction from the Vicksburg District, and unflinching support from ORVA and the Arkansas Waterways Commission.

ORVA Congressional Visits

One of the primary objectives of the Association is to maintain collaborative relationships with our elected officials. ORVA representatives meet with Congressional members from Arkansas and Louisiana, and key representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers typically twice a year in the spring and early fall. Issues with COVID prevented visits in the fall of 2020 and this past spring.

Plans are currently being made for ORVA leadership to visit our Arkansas and Louisiana delegations this coming September 2021. The Association continues to maintain close working relationships with our congressional members and their staffs. Thanks to the efforts of our congressional leadership, “Water Supply” was added as a feature of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project. This add was an important victory for the people of the Ouachita River Basin.

2020 Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA 2020)

The Association takes the opportunity to thank the members of our Congressional delegation in Arkansas and Louisiana for their tremendous work in support of this very important piece of legislation. The Water Resources and Development Act of 2020 (WRDA 2020) was signed into law on December 27, 2020 by President Trump. We were naturally excited about **the passage of the language adding water supply as a feature of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project**. This was an important victory for the people of the Ouachita River Basin!

The Association believes adding the lower 63 miles of the east bank of the Ouachita River levee system (“at and below Monroe, Louisiana to Caldwell Parish, Louisiana”) to the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project is also critical. Recent language in the WRDA 2020 is interpreted as requiring a feasibility analysis prior to the inclusion of the relevant levee section into the MR&T. Our local Corps partners, we’ve learned, are currently waiting on implementation guidance from Corps Headquarters in Washington. Certainly, adding the 63 miles to the MR&T, will be a plus for the Ouachita-Black. Mr. Weeks, in his recent testimony before the Mississippi River Commission, requested their support and it is discussed at every opportunity with decision-makers. The Association will also continue to address this topic with our Congressional delegation who fully support this important add.

Update - Ouachita River Bank Stabilization & Levee Rehabilitation Project

The Corps awarded a contract to Luhr Brothers, Inc. 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 many area residents are unaware of the project.

The \$28,117,000.00 contract, administered by the Vidalia Area Office, US Army Corps of Engineers, calls for an estimated 609,000 tons of stone to be placed. As of this date, the project is 78% complete with 489,617 tons of "A" stone placed. High water has delayed the project throughout most of the spring. The Corps estimates the project will resume work once the river reaches ~25 feet and continues to fall.

The purpose of the project is to stabilize portions of the Ouachita River embankment to prevent bank erosion and caving. 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.

Blakely Mountain Dam-Lake Ouachita, Narrows Dam-Lake Greeson, and DeGray Lake – Value to the Nation

Natural and recreational resources at USACE lakes provide social, economic, and environmental benefits to all Americans. These Fast Facts will highlight some of the benefits related to the Vicksburg District's role in managing natural and recreational resources at the three Corps lakes within the Ouachita River Basin.

Social Benefits

Ouachita, Greeson, and DeGray together provide more than 89 recreation areas, 573 picnic sites, 2,139 camping sites, 35 playgrounds, 39 swimming areas, 41 trails with 154 total trail miles for walkers/hikers/joggers, 6 fishing docks and piers, 60 boat ramps, and 4,961 marina slips resulting in 3,889,452 visits (person-days/nights) in FY2019. The public outreach contacts were 66,857. By providing opportunities for active recreation, these three lakes help combat one of the most significant of the Nation's health problems: lack of physical activity (the effects of which cannot be accurately measured in terms of social or economic impact.)

Economic Benefits

Visitation for each lake is measured separately, i.e., visitor spending, sales, jobs, labor income, and value added within 30 miles of the lake (each astronomical by itself). The economic data for FY2019 with multiplier effects, resulted in visitor spending of:

- \$109,668,700 in total sales
- Which produced 1,636 jobs
- \$37,938,970 in labor income
- \$58,021,294 in value added (wages and salaries, payroll benefits, profits, rents, and indirect business taxes)

Environmental Benefits

To put this in an area perspective, the three Corps lakes together contribute 53,357 land acres, 61,110 water acres, and 1,031 shoreline miles.

Comparing FY21 funding information (from page 9) with the FY19 data above, we see a tremendous cost benefit ratio. We'll look at the economic effects of the entire Ouachita-Black in future editions as data becomes available.

FACTS

- Based on economic data from Fiscal Year 2021, visitation at the Blakely Mountain Dam-Lake Ouachita results in:

- ✓ \$88,820,839 in visitor spending within 30 miles of the USACE lake
- ✓ \$42,512,958 in sales within 30 miles of the USACE lake
- ✓ 743 jobs within 30 miles of the USACE lake
- ✓ \$16,472,762 in labor income within 30 miles of the USACE lake
- ✓ \$22,830,507 in value added within 30 miles of the USACE lake
- ✓ \$17,783,106 in National Economic Development Benefits

Recreational programs and activities at USACE lakes help strengthen family ties and friendships; provide opportunities for children to develop personal skills, social values, and self-esteem; and increase water safety.

- The Vicksburg District, US Army Corps of Engineers, encompasses a 68,000-square-mile area across portions of Mississippi, Arkansas and Louisiana, holds seven major river basins, are engaged in hundreds of projects, and employs approximately 1,100 personnel.



Pictured at the Public Meeting with the Mississippi River Commission in April, L-R, Ms. Patricia Hemphill, Vicksburg District,

Mr. David Weeks, Ouachita River Valley Association, Mr. Richard Brontoli, Red River Valley Association, and an unidentified lady.

Mr. Charles Thomas II

The Association's leadership was saddened to learn of the passing this past February 16 of long-time ORVA member, Mr. Charles E. "Charlie" Thomas II. Mr. Thomas was very instrumental in helping to save the Sparta Aquifer. All who knew him, know what a generous spirit he had and how his generosity impacted the Sparta Recovery/Ouachita River Alternative Water Supply Project.

"Charlie Thomas took the first step toward saving the Sparta Aquifer by donating land on the bank of the Ouachita River for the intake structure and land for the water treatment plant and pipeline to the Union County Water Conservation Board. We are grateful for the value of this property and for the symbol of leadership that inspired others to donate rights-of-way. In addition, we received his wise counsel when needed." Robert M. Reynolds, Founding President 1999-2015, *Union County Water Conservation Board*

"In 1997, when we began addressing the Sparta aquifer decline countywide, we identified key trusted leaders representing all stakeholder groups — major water utility, rural/municipal water associations, industrial and residential customers, taxpayers, county judge, El Dorado mayor — we needed a trusted voice on the stakeholder team that knew every ebb and flow of the Ouachita River. There was only one person who fit that description — Charlie Thomas. He served as an ad hoc advisor and non-voting member of the stakeholder group throughout project development."

Charlie loved it when the Corps sent "the boat" upriver to the Port of Camden and ORVA members got to mix and mingle on board over a wonderful. He particularly enjoyed the opportunity to cuss and discuss with long-time ORVA member Ed Horton and long-time secretary/treasurer Eunice Platt.

Mr. Thomas will be sorely missed by the members of the Ouachita River Valley Association and the people of the Ouachita River Basin.

Statement presented to the Mississippi River Commission

On the cold and rainy afternoon of April 14, 2021, Mr. David Weeks, Executive Director of the Ouachita River Valley Association, presented a brief to the Mississippi River Commission (MRC) in Vicksburg, MS. The "testimony" as it is referred to by the MRC, summarized the written statement (shown in its entirety in the following paragraphs) which was also delivered to the Commission.

“General Holland and Members of the Mississippi River Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to address the major concerns of the Ouachita River Valley Association (ORVA).

The Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project continues to face a lack of funds for dredging and backlog maintenance, to include the three Corps lakes. The Association estimates the minimum annual requirement for the



Ouachita-Black Rivers Project to be \$10.7M in Operations and Maintenance as reflected here:

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

Not only is funding for the Project at a standstill, Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 funding is 25% below the \$10.7M annual need. We respectfully ask for your support for full funding of the dredging and maintenance of the Project in the FY22 Budget. Full funding allows for improved maintenance and increased river capacity/usage. The Association greatly appreciates the Commission’s continued support and its efforts to express capability for dredging, maintenance, lock operations, and recreation for the Project.

The President’s annual budget is usually released mid-February but early indications are that it will be delayed until late Spring 2021. Hopefully, the delay will not signal another downward spiral in needed funding.

Concerning recreation, ORVA greatly supports the Commission’s position and the Corps’ funding for recreational areas along the Ouachita-Black Rivers and its tributaries. 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 and recreation product. Combined with other recreational areas managed by state, local, and private entities, this surge of visitors provides a huge economic impact to the communities within the Ouachita River Basin. The economic value associated with tourism and recreation alone at these Corps lakes is tremendous with more than one million visitors annually. To fully support the necessary backlog maintenance of these Corps lakes, additional resources are needed. Fiscal Year 2021 capability is estimated at \$46M. Congress passed the Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA) of 2020 which was signed into law by President Trump on

December 27, 2020. The exciting news is that the Act modifies the Ouachita-Black Rivers Project for Navigation to include water supply as an authorized purpose. It also includes authorizing the Corps of Engineers to review and report on the inclusion of a portion of the Ouachita River Levee onto the Mississippi River & Tributaries (MR&T) Project.



For people within the Ouachita River Basin water supply is an extremely important and necessary feature of the Navigation Project. Water Supply has been a top priority for the Association and an increasingly important component of the river. The Project provides a dependable source of water for municipal, industrial, and agricultural use along its entire length; there are several success stories concerning water supply. Modification to include water supply as an authorized purpose of the Project is a

victory for those communities within the Basin.

Contained within WRDA 2020 is language authorizing the Corps to review a project proposal and issue a report to Congress on whether the lower 63 miles of the Ouachita River Levee System at and below Monroe, Louisiana, to Caldwell Parish, Louisiana should be included in the MR&T Project. Looking back, WRDA 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 MR&T Project. The WRDA 2007, however, did not reinstate the lower 63 miles of the east bank from Monroe south to the end of the east bank system. At one point, the 63 miles did, in fact, fall within the umbrella of the MR&T Program. Although the issue has been contentious for years, several historical and official documents do exist that reference that portion of the river as part of the MR&T Program. The goal of the Association, all along, has been to restore, or reinstate, the lower 63 miles where the majority of erosion and damage occurs.

Although the efforts undertaken by the PL 84-99 program are critically important to the repair and stabilization of the Ouachita riverbank, ORVA believes the inclusion of the lower 63 miles is paramount to the sustained protection of the levee system. Restoration of the lower 63 miles is an ORVA top priority, if not its highest priority. The inclusion of this part of the river not only provides the assurance of a necessary funding stream but alleviates ambiguities of responsibility for that segment of the Project in the future.



Mr. Weeks discusses ORVA priorities with Col. Robert Hilliard, District Commander.

Modifying the Project to add bank stabilization as a Project feature is another focus area of the Association. 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 highly pleased with the planned and ongoing repairs at multiple bank caving sites through the PL 84-99 program.

As briefly mentioned above, the Corps significantly contributes to the economies of Arkansas and Louisiana by supporting the Project in the areas of tourism, recreation, and development. The upgrades and rehabilitation of campsites and facilities within the Ouachita River Basin (Lake Ouachita for example) have had tremendous results in increased attendance and economic surge within the area.



The upgrades and rehabilitation of campsites and facilities within the Ouachita River Basin (Lake Ouachita for example) have had tremendous results in increased attendance and economic surge within the area.

Mr. Weeks briefs the Mississippi River Commission while Col. Robert Hilliard looks on.

Construction of a new Lake DeGray Field Office and Interpretive Visitor Center is another project area in which the Corps can make a difference. This construction project is also a priority for the Association. The Lake DeGray Field Office is the last remaining facility to be replaced at the Vicksburg Districts' Arkansas Lake Projects. For one reason or another, the project has been backlogged for more than ten years. The project, conservatively estimated at between \$4.8-\$5M is sorely needed. Construction of this field office to include the construction of an Interpretive Visitor Center, is not only important to the economic health of the community and critical for area visitors, but is also necessary for the safety and health of Corps employees.

In 2017, Professors Robert Eisenstadt and Paul Nelson, with the University of Louisiana at Monroe Center for Economic Research, published a study outlining the economic impact of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project. The researchers examined direct/indirect and induced economic impact resulting from several different uses of the River, including: navigation; municipal water supply; industrial water supply; recreation; agriculture; and wastewater discharge.

Upcoming North Louisiana Events

Crappie USA Region 4 championships
Deep South Racing
BASS Nation Championships

June 25 - 26
June 26 - 27
October 30 - November 8

The study finds that the Ouachita-Black Rivers' economic value to the region is high; commercial use of the river generates nearly \$5.7 billion annually and is linked to nearly 21,000 full-time jobs in Louisiana and Arkansas. Further, commercial activities have returned \$1.2 billion to households throughout the region. This is particularly important, as the report



identifies the counties and parishes in the Lower Ouachita as depressed economic areas. It should be noted that the researchers warn that rescinded Federal funds could lead to unregulated flow, which would result in a drop in water levels. This would have an adverse impact on all the aforementioned uses of the Rivers (e.g., navigation, water intake for industrial processes, etc.), thus harming the economy of the entire region.

Photo Courtesy of Clay Manly

In late February 2021, the Environmental Protection Agency issued a report titled "Deeper Look at the Ouachita River." The report details how the Ouachita serves as a center for navigation, recreation, economic development, drinking water, and community identity. While the report focuses primarily on Ouachita Parish, Louisiana, much of the report can be applied to the Ouachita River Basin as a whole.

ORVA's Major Concerns

- Lack of funds for Dredging and Backlog Maintenance
- Adding Water Supply as a feature of the Navigation Project
- "Restoring" the lower 63 miles of the east bank of the Ouachita River levee to the MR&T Project
- Modifying the Project to include bank stabilization as a Project feature
- Construction of a new Lake DeGray Field Office and Interpretive Visitor Center

A River Basin of Opportunity...A Century Plus of Commitment

At its inception in 1893, the sole purpose of the Association was to obtain a year-round commercial navigation system on the Ouachita River in Arkansas and Louisiana. Today, while the major focus of ORVA is on operation, maintenance, and completion

of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project and associated infrastructure, the Association also supports the economic development projects throughout the Basin. The River is a system of systems: navigation, recreation, water supply, fish and wildlife conservation, flood damage reduction, and wastewater discharge.

Although tonnage in recent years has slipped, as evidenced in the above-mentioned reports, 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
- Placing the lower 63 miles of the east bank of the Ouachita River levee to the MR&T Project
- Modifying the Project to add bank stabilization as a Project feature
- Construction of a new Lake DeGray Field Office and Interpretive Visitor Center

The Association greatly appreciates the opportunity to present this statement to the members of the Mississippi River 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 are proud to be considered a valued partner with the Vicksburg District. 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 the Ouachita River Basin.

Please contact me at david.weeks.ORVA@Outlook.com or 318-366-3834 (Mobile) if I can be of assistance or answer any questions. Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement on behalf of the members of the Association.

Mayor Crystal Marshall of Crossett fills Vacant Board Member Position

The ORVA Board of Directors has selected Mayor Crystal Marshall, Mayor of Crossett, Arkansas, to fill the position previously held by former Crossett Mayor Scott McCormick who passed away April 16, 2020.



Mayor Marshall was elected to the City Council in 2016 and prior to her election, served as the interim Mayor for four months after the passing of Mayor McCormick. Revitalization of the City and infrastructure improvements are two of her top priorities for Crossett. Mayor Marshall, the city's first female mayor, brings a wealth of experience, both corporate and private, a knowledge of city government, and an active involvement in the City's Parks and Recreation Department to ORVA. Her extensive knowledge and experience in project management, resource management, budgeting, system design, and problem solving will greatly benefit the Association as we work together to benefit the people of the Ouachita River Basin.

Mayor Marshall is fully invested in the future of Crossett and actively engaged in her community, serving as a volunteer with many civic organizations. She and her husband Courtney have twin daughters and are proud to call Crossett home.

“The Great Camden Outside Fun Day”

The City of Camden and Arkansas Bass Team Trial invites you to join them on Saturday, August 7, 2021 for the **Rumble on the River Bass Tournament**. Other events happening on that Saturday will be a **Disc Golf Tournament** at Carnes Park, **5K Run/Walk** on The Trace (morning), a **10K Bike Ride** leaving from downtown and riding along the Trace (evening), a **Baggo Tournament, Golf Tournament** at Highland Golf Course, and **Horse Show** at Circle C Arena.

Mayor Julian Lott and The Great Camden Outside Fun Day organizers anticipate the bass tournament will draw a significant number of anglers to Camden and allow the community an opportunity, as well as other area residents, to come together for a fun event. Look at the Arkansas Bass Team Trial website to register online for the bass tournament or visit the Camden Area Chamber of Commerce website for information on all Fun Day events.

ORVA 55th Annual Conference

Planning is currently underway for the 55th Annual Conference. The conference will 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, is planned for August 12-13, 2021.



Several key individuals have been invited to speak and have accepted. That said, we are anticipating a substantial turnout. We're starting to see more and more activities and believe with vaccinations and a substantial decline in COVID-related cases, that people have had enough "cabin fever" and are ready to get

out and get on with life. The Association's Board has built in substantial opportunities for networking and ideas interchange, and will include a dredging forum moderated by Mr. Johnny Martin, Chair of ORVA's Navigation Committee.

West Monroe's Convention Center



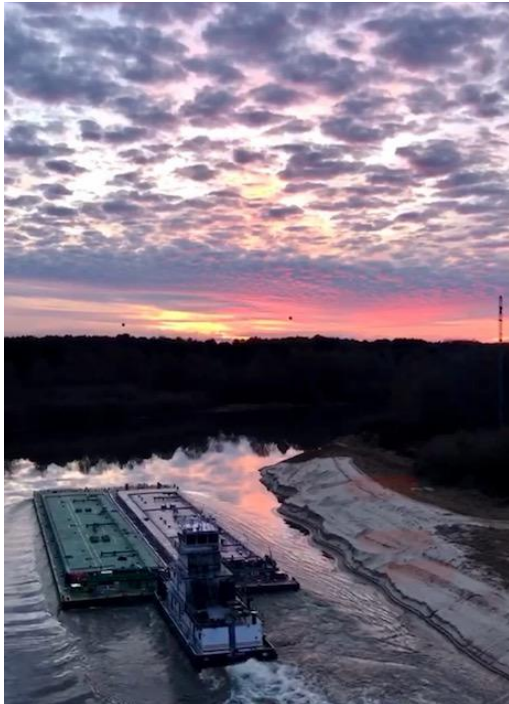
ORVA Membership Opportunities

Like any successful organization, the Ouachita River Valley Association is focused on membership retention and recruitment. The strength of ORVA is its membership. Numbers speak volumes and competition for Federal funding is very competitive in today's environment. It is imperative that the strength of our voices be heard. To that end, our congressional

representatives understand that we speak for our members and they are very intent on meeting with us, hearing our issues, needs, and requests.

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.

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 in the economic development of the Basin should be a member of the Association.

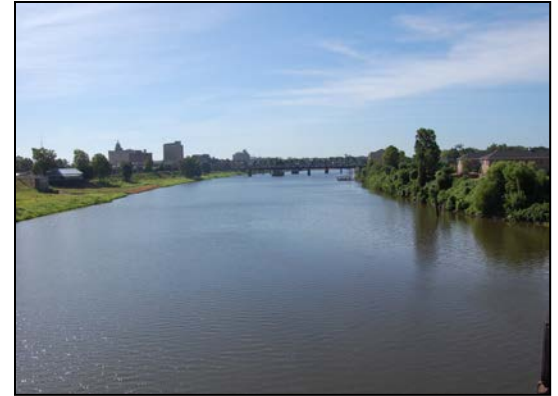


Photos Courtesy of Clay Manly

The Ouachita River at Monroe.

We have all heard that a picture is worth a thousand words. These two pictures were shown at the Public Hearing with the Mississippi River Commission this past August 2020.

These pictures depict the Ouachita River at Monroe today and an artist's rendition of what the Ouachita would look like if it were not for the Corps' Locks and Dams. The Corps' substantial investment in the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project has yielded much more than economic opportunities for the people of the Basin. As you might imagine, the pictures garnered much attention and comments from the Commissioners.



Just as it is in any successful partnership, ORVA believes relationships are extremely important. We are proud of our association with the Vicksburg District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and proud to be considered a valued partner with them and other great organizations that work together to further the development of water and land resources projects which greatly support the people and communities of the Ouachita River Basin.



Post Office Box 913
Camden, AR 71711

Invite a friend to become an ORVA member.