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

ORVA
Ouachita River Valley Association
Serving Arkansas and Louisiana

ORVA NEWS

Ouachita River Valley Association

"Dedicated to Quality of Life in the Ouachita Valley"

SPRING 2022

MISSION:
ORVA is non-profit organization that promotes the development of water and land resources projects that are engineered and economically feasible, environmentally sustainable, and publicly acceptable that enhance the general welfare of the people in the Ouachita River Basin in Arkansas, Louisiana, and the Nation.

Spring 2022
OUACHITA-BLACK RIVERS NAVIGATION PROJECT

Spring is in the air and (hopefully) the battle with COVID is drawing down. We are quickly moving back to what we've come to know as the "new" normal. That said, please schedule ORVA's annual conference on your calendar – August 11-12, 2022. Planning is currently underway for what promises to be an exciting event. We'll be joined by Louisiana's Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry, Dr. Mike Strain, as well as other key leaders. It will be a great time to reconnect, network, and exchange ideas, as well as receive informative presentations focusing on the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project. You will not want to miss this important conference!

In this newsletter issue, we discuss funding, tonnage for the Ouachita-Black, project updates, funding, and levels of service (which is garnering increased interest with many of our partners). We look also at the Statement to the Mississippi River Commission, a discussion of the events at H.K. Thatcher Lock and Dam, and an interesting piece for "Civil War" buffs focusing on events at Camden, Arkansas. Featured also in this publication is a section devoted to Mr. John Stringer who will retire this summer from the Tensas Basin Levee District. Mr. Stringer will also step down as ORVA's Vice President. The Levee District and ORVA are closely related and share the same interests with the Project. Mr. Stringer is known throughout the Basin as the "face of ORVA", and rightfully so.

Our next issue will focus on some of our principal river users and discuss highlights from our August conference. In the interim, we plan to focus on updating and improving our website, visiting our members, and increasing our ORVA membership. There is strength in numbers!

Hot Springs' Water Supply Project on Schedule Despite Delivery Delays

Supply shortages and delivery delays have not dammed up the flow of progress on the **City of Hot Springs' $110 million Lake Ouachita Water Supply Project**. Arguably one of the largest infrastructure investments in the city's history, the project continues to have an expected completion in late 2023.

In July 2021, two milestones took place with the completion of the first raw-water line contract and the beginning of site preparation for the water treatment plant, which included grading, backwash lagoons, fencing and miscellaneous concrete structures for underground piping. The site preparation contract was completed in December 2021. The approximately two-mile section of 48" pipe was competed and tested.

In November 2021, following several months of review, the Army Corps of Engineers approved the permit for the intake structure and supply lake tap. This was a big step forward in the plan to bore through Blakely Mountain–and gravity-feed water to the new treatment plant 17 miles away.

In December, two 4-million-gallon backwash lagoons had taken shape at the 33-acre site of the new water treatment plant. The lagoons will be used to hold the water treatment plant's filter backwash water prior to discharge. Also, a $4.2 million contract was awarded for the 3- million-gallon clear well, which will be 160 feet in diameter by 20 feet tall.

In January of this year, a contract for $9.2 million was awarded for the second contract under the raw water main installation wing of the project. It entails 21,000 feet of 42-inch steel pipe. Because of steel pipe delivery delays, this project is set to begin in June.

In February, the final design for the new water treatment plant was completed by Crist Engineers. Located in the beautiful rolling countryside hills on the southwest section of the city, the treatment plant facility – designed to appear as a large, modern, red barn – will blend into its surroundings.

In March, Michels Corporation had obtained all of the required regulatory agency permits for the intake and tunnel portion of this project. The clearing and grading for the South Portal of the tunnel (land side) began in April. All steel pipe (2,600 feet) has been delivered to Michels, and all the long lead-time items have been ordered. Tunneling is set to start in July of this year.

Currently, between 500 and 1,000 feet of pipe are being put in the ground per week, depending on how much rock is encountered, under raw water main contracts 3 and 5. Excavation also began recently for the 3-million-gallon clear well.

The Utilities Department had a time-lapse camera installed on a 60-foot-high tower to keep a record of construction progress and to provide security for the new water treatment plant site. The camera captures a picture every 30 minutes, throughout the day and night, and will continue for two years throughout the construction process. A link to the camera feed is available at www.cityhs.net/Utilities.

Article and photos above (top to bottom) courtesy of Bill Burrough, City Manager, City of Hot Springs:

– Installation of approximately 2 miles of 48-inch welded steel pipe was completed in July by Belt Construction. When fully completed, the raw water main will allow water from Lake Ouachita to flow by gravity to the new water treatment plant.

– ***drone of backwash lagoons*** – The two 4-million-gallon backwash lagoons have taken shape at the 33-acre site of the new water treatment plant.

– ***rendering of treatment plant*** – The design of the new water treatment plant will blend into its beautiful countryside surroundings.

– In October 2021, while attending the Water Environment Federation Technical Conference in Chicago, (left to right) Todd Piller (Project Manager), Monty Ledbetter (Utilities Director) and Matt Dunn, of Crist Engineers, visited the Michels Corporation in Brownsville, Wisconsin. The company specializes in horizontal directional drilling and direct pipe micro-tunneling. The pictured equipment, manufactured in Germany, was specially made to tunnel through Blakely Mountain as part of the new water supply project.

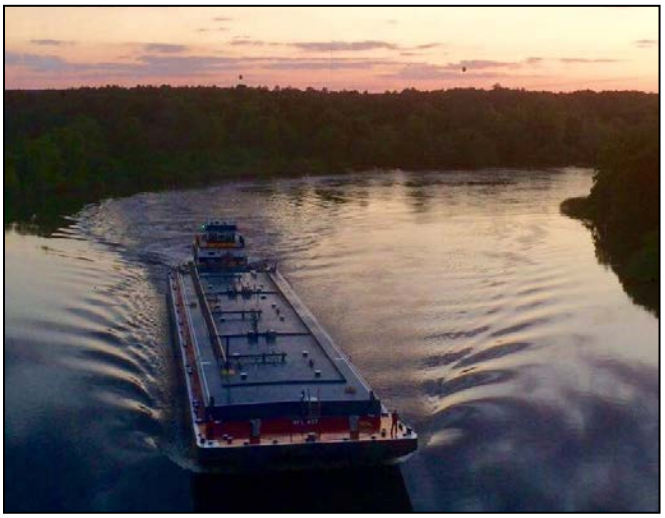
2021 Commercial Tonnage

Tonnage numbers have again surpassed the 1 million metric ton mark (the standard point for determining whether the waterway is a mid or low-use waterway) for calendar year 2021. The great majority of that tonnage is due to the movement of rock for the Monroe River Bank Stabilization and Levee Rehabilitation Project which is known locally as the Monroe Floodwall Project. That project was completed earlier this spring and numbers definitely "tell the tale."

Jonesville 1/1/2021 – 12/31/2021			
Commodity	Upbound (KTONS)	Downbound (KTONS)	Total YTD (KTONS)
Gasoline Incl Aviation (Except Jet)	208.200		208.200
Residual Fuel Oil	178.600		178.600
Fertilizers	9.600		9.600
Limestone	634.600		634.600
Sand and Gravel	9.600		9.600
Lime	6.400		6.400
Corn		123.200	123.200
Soybeans		183.300	183.300
Machinery/Bulkheads (Not Electric)	16.000	14.100	30.100
Other	.593	.005	.598
Total	1,063.000	320.600	1,384.312

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 calendar year 2021. Data derived from the Jonesville Lock and Dam is selected because it is a good representation of tonnage on the river.

Tonnage is off to a slow start for calendar year 2022. For the period 1 January-31 March 2022, KTONS totaled 209 with Gasoline (48 KTONS), Residual Fuel Oil (48 KTONS), and Limestone (69 KTONS) as the top three commodities.



General Marine Services navigates the Ouachita River inland waterway system providing customers with extraordinary operational performance in safety, logistics, personnel, and economics.

Levels of Service

The Corps plan, which began on July 29, 2012, involved operating the four locks for two shifts daily. The Jonesville and Columbia Locks daily operational hours were increased from 18 to 20 while the Felsenthal and H. K. Thatcher Locks were operated 16 hours daily. This change in level of service resulted from the Corps' (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) review of project usage based on criteria contained in the IMT study which provides guidelines for the level of service to be provided by navigation projects.

This plan was implemented after the Corps conducted five public meetings and published the plan in the Federal Register for public comment. Throughout the entire process the stakeholders overwhelming objected to any reduction in the levels of service. The Corps' reasoning: a continuous level of service was unsustainable, the Study was based on Fiscal Year 2012 necessary budget reductions, the reduction in operating hours would extend the life of the locks and reduce operating expenses. Finally, it was believed that the reductions in levels of service would allow the Corps to focus funds on lock maintenance.

The regulation led to more cuts in lock operation scheduling in subsequent years. With Operations Order (OPORD) 2012-63, "Inland Marine Transportation System (IMTS) Process Improvement, Standard Levels of Service" known as the "Levels of Service Regulation," the Corps, on November 15, 2015, began operating Felsenthal and Thatcher five days per week, Monday thru Friday, 10 hours per day with no weekend service. With the Levels of Service Regulation in effect, lock operation is determined in large part to recent levels of metric tons passed through the locks. What this means is that the system is rear-facing – always looking back rather than forward. (We also believe funding is tied to tonnage; look at calendar year 2020 and 2021 tonnage.)

At that time, ORVA was terribly concerned with the implementation of the IMTS Study which reduced the level of service. The primary concern was the adverse impact to potential economic development that would be associated with the navigation project: increased costs to shippers, and the perception that this action, in combination with reduced funding for dredging and operation and maintenance, would slowly strangle the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project.

That concern was valid. Soon after implementation, delay times represented a financial loss to shippers, recreational lockages were down more than half, and new industry was hesitant to invest in operations on the Ouachita-Black. Although we've seen recent increases in funding, the results of the implementation still hold true today. The reduction in the level of service, combined with inadequate funding for dredging operations, has stymied economic development, especially in the Arkansas portion of the Project. Industry is cautious – reluctant to invest substantial funds for new business ventures thereby threatening the potential future economy of areas historically served by commerce along the river.

With fuel costs at an all-time high for overland transportation (with seemingly no end in sight), use of the Ouachita-Black (a different interstate highway system) may become more attractive for shipping, and should (hopefully) be attractive to new industry. Hopefully, it's not too late.

John Stringer, Vice President, Ouachita River Valley Association

John Stringer grew up on a small family farm in rural Morehouse Parish, Louisiana and graduated from Bastrop High School. Upon graduation, John worked as a "roustabout" on an offshore drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico.

Returning from Vietnam. Note the Golden Gate Bridge.

John was notified in early 1969 by the local draft board that his number was up. It was the height of the war in Vietnam. He joined the United States Navy shortly thereafter and served for four years. During his service, he completed three tours in Vietnam, serving in special operations with a destroyer as his base platform of operations. Awards include the Vietnam Campaign Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal with 4 bronze stars, and the Armed Forces Service Medal (Korea) among others. As you might imagine, John was overjoyed to return to the United States and his wife Peggy, who he married in August 1969 just prior to shipping overseas. This August he and Peggy will be married 53 years.

Return from Vietnam

After leaving the Navy, John enrolled in Northeast Louisiana University (now University of Louisiana Monroe) and received a Batchelor's Degree in Business Management.

Graduating from college, John was employed by the Tensas Basin Levee District as the Assistant to the President, beginning August 1, 1976. In 1984, he was named the Executive Director. In that capacity, he oversaw the operation and maintenance of over 400 miles of levee and 350 miles of drainage channel.

John has served in several key positions throughout his impressive career. He served as a member of Governor Bobby Jindal's transition team as an advisor on coastal and flood control issues. He has served on the Board of the Louisiana Drainage Association, is currently a Commissioner on the Morehouse Parish Lake Commission, board member and Vice President of the Ouachita River Valley Association and State Vice

John Stringer with members of the Louisiana Army National Guard inspecting flood damage on the lower Ouachita.

President from Louisiana for the Mississippi Valley Flood Control Association. John is a graduate of the University of New Orleans Government Leadership Institute.

When learning of John's retirement, Mike Dumas, former ORVA President stated, "during my tenure as President of ORVA I was fortunate to have a Vice President like John Stringer. John had contacts. He knew important people in high places and they knew him. That meant a lot for the Ouachita River Valley Association. I enjoyed my time serving the river association and John made it a real pleasure. ORVA will have to work much harder to cover for the retirement of John Stringer! Thank you, John, and may you have a blessed retirement."

Inspecting the flood wall in downtown Monroe, La., March 16, 2016

Randy Denmon, ORVA's current President, echoed many of the same comments as Mike Dumas. "John is a one-of-a-kind individual who knows how to successfully communicate and make things happen," said Denmon, "he knows how to get things done." Denmon is very complimentary of John Stringer and his work ethic, "what John brings to the table is unmatched; he is much of the driving force behind ORVA's success."

John Stringer, ORVA Vice President, with Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas and Bill Hobgood, former Executive Director of ORVA, 2017

Bill Hobgood, former Executive Director of ORVA, noted that, "John has been the 'go-to' person for reliable information by television, radio, newspapers, local, state, federal officials, and concerned citizens anytime a flooding, river transportation, water supply, recreation, or other water related issue arose in the Basin." John Stringer has been instrumental in much of the success of the Association. Well known and well respected, John Stringer has been the face of ORVA for the past 47 years. "He is unmatchable in coordinating with other water resource agencies and congressional officials which has resulted in the development of numerous projects that have contributed greatly to the overall economic development of the Ouachita Basin," said Hobgood.

Asked to serve as the President many times in that period of time, he has always believed that the President should represent business in the Ouachita River Basin. In the early 1980's, ORVA nearly went dormant as an organization. Camden Mayor Chris Claybaker asked John to step in as the Association Vice President and it began to grow in membership and

credibility. ORVA enjoys an outstanding reputation with past and current congressional delegations.

ORVA has experienced many changes in the past five decades. "The stakes have gotten a little higher," in today's environment according to Mr. Stringer. One of his biggest accomplishments has been the "reinstatement" of 52 miles of Ouachita River levee to the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project.

When asked what he would like to see for the Ouachita-Black, he stated, "to have the navigation project funded to its fullest extent," noting that "it is the lifeblood of the region." He would like to see the fuel terminals south of Monroe, LA "re-energized" and the lower 63 miles south of Monroe to Caldwell Parish reinstated to the MR&T. He noted that it was removed from MR&T, "but I can't see that for a number of reasons." Finally, John believes ORVA must concentrate on membership, "it is critical to our very existence."

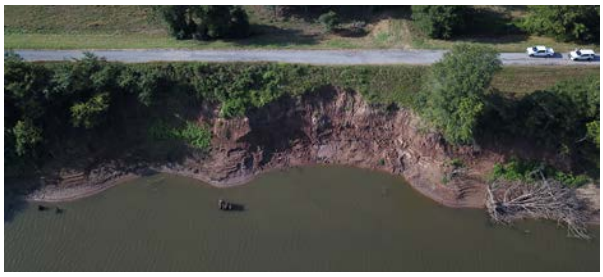
John and Peggy still live in the same area where he grew up. His son, Phillip, lives close with granddaughters Sara Beth and Ellie.

"John Stringer will be sorely missed but he is a great leader and great leaders do two things," said Hobgood. "They leave the organization in better shape than they found it and they prepare a subordinate to take over after they retire. I truly enjoyed working with John and wish him and his family the very best in his retirement."

John Stringer is truly a "one-of-a-kind individual" as Randy Denmon said. His level of commitment, his knowledge of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project, and the almost 50 years of experience is unmatched. We wish you and your family the very best in this next phase of your life. "Fair Winds and Following Seas." You will be missed.

During February's Red River Valley Association Conference in Shreveport, LA, David Weeks, Executive Director for ORVA discusses river issues with Col Robert Hilliard, Commander and District Engineer and Ms. Pat Hemphill, Deputy District Engineer for Programs and Project Management, both with the Vicksburg District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Red River Valley Association (RRVA) Conference was an outstanding venue.



The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has authority under Public Law (PL) 84-99 to provide reimbursement for specific damages to levees and supplement local efforts that result from high-water events**.**

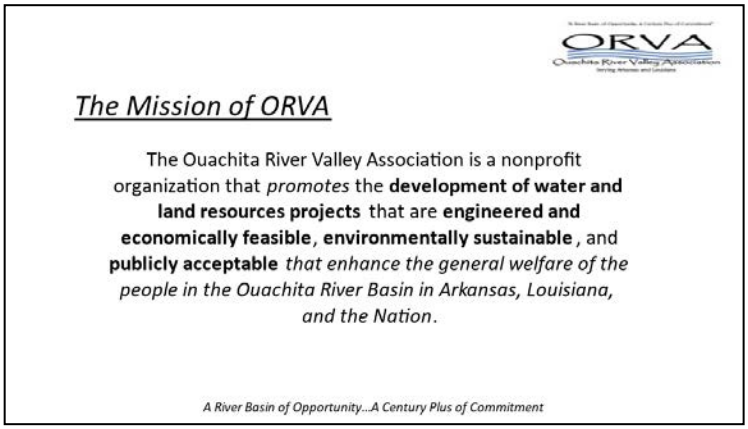
This picture represents one of the many bank caving sites. The Vicksburg District continues to support the Tensas Basin Levee District with funding for repairs. See **WRDA 2022** on page 29.

Statement to the Mississippi River Commission – 6 April 2022 – Greenville, MS

General Holland and Members of the Mississippi River Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity and privilege to present this statement and address ORVA's major needs and concerns on behalf of the members of the Association.

The Ouachita River Valley Association has been in existence for more than 128 years and has a proud record of past achievements and longevity. We represent the private sector of the economy involved in the development of water and land resources in the Ouachita River Valley. We operate in the States of Arkansas and Louisiana and are governed by a Board of Directors consisting of three officers and seven directors from each state.



At its inception in 1893, the sole purpose of the non-profit 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 economic development projects throughout the Basin.

The mission of our Association is to promote the development of water and land resources projects that are engineered and economically feasible, environmentally sustainable, and publicly acceptable that enhance the general welfare of the people in the Ouachita River Basin in Arkansas, Louisiana, and the Nation. Our major interests include navigation, water supply (commercial, industrial, and

agricultural), recreation and conservation, waste water discharge, flood damage reduction, and economic development.

The Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 funding for the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project is $12.065M for Operations and Maintenance. Considering FY 2021 funding was a total of $7.625M, the funding picture for the Project is the best it has been in most recent memory. For years, the Association has estimated the annual requirement for the Project (with no adjustments for inflation) to be $10.7M in Operations and Maintenance. This estimate is projected as $3.3M for dredging, $1.6M for routine maintenance, $4M for lock operations, and $1.8M for recreation. And although the Project received a substantial increase in funding in FY 2022 over FY 2021 levels, it still faces a lack of funding for backlog maintenance which the Corps estimates at $22M. The issue with the leak in the hinge crest gate at H.K. Thatcher Lock and Dam is only an example of a lack of maintenance for the Project over the years. The district reacted quickly this past fall to address the loss of pool at Thatcher which could have had dire consequences to the water intake at Camden Water Utilities (some 52 river miles away) which supports the City of Camden and most of Ouachita County.

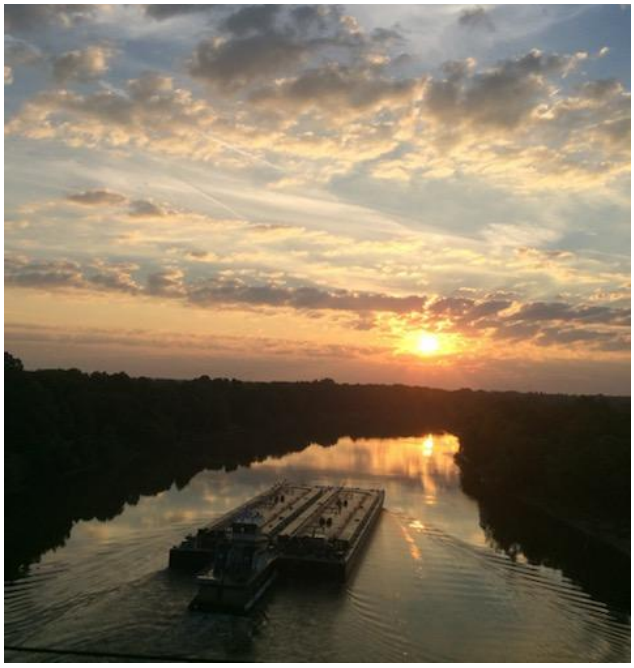


Photo Courtesy of Clay Manly

The passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in November 2021 added some relief to funding shortfalls. With the IIJA Spend Plan for O&M in FY 2022, Blakely Dam and Lake Ouachita will receive $2.24M, DeGray Lake $1.635M, and Narrows Dam/Lake Greeson $2.211M. The Ouachita and Black Rivers will receive $3.915M. The summary of the work for the Ouachita-Black includes replacing barriers at Moon Lake Recreation Area, silt removal from recreation areas, repair of H.K. Thatcher Lock and Dam hinge crest gate, and repair/replace Felsenthal Lock and Dam tainter gate.

A reinstatement of the 63 miles of the east bank of the Ouachita River levee (“at and below Monroe, Louisiana to Caldwell Parish, Louisiana”) into the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project has been a priority for ORVA. The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) 2020 included language requiring a feasibility analysis prior to the inclusion of this relevant levee section into the MR&T Program. Looking back at previous WRDA legislation, 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 south where the majority of erosion and damage occurs.

The Association believes that adding, or rather reinstating, the 63 miles of the east bank of the Ouachita River levee (“at and below Monroe, Louisiana to Caldwell Parish, Louisiana”) to the MR&T Project is critical. Like the restorations resulting from the 2007 language, it in simple

terms places the portion of the levee system under federal authority (responsibility) for maintenance and repair. Flooding and high-water levels have substantially increased the possibility for system failure leading to potentially catastrophic results. Needless to say, this restoration is a plus for navigation and flood control for the people of the Ouachita River Basin.

The restoration of the lower 63 miles was presented and discussed at the MRC Low Water Meeting this past August and addressed in ORVA's written Statement. In your written response to that statement dated October 22, 2021 you noted, "we continue to await implementation guidance from USACE on how to proceed in regard to generating a proposal regarding incorporation of the lower 63 miles of the Ouachita River Levee System as a part of the Mississippi River Tributary Project."

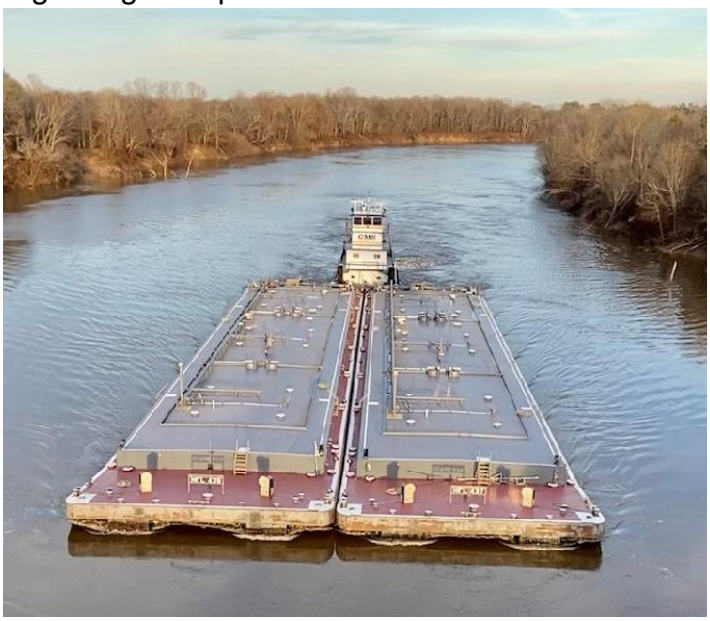


Photo courtesy of Clay Manly

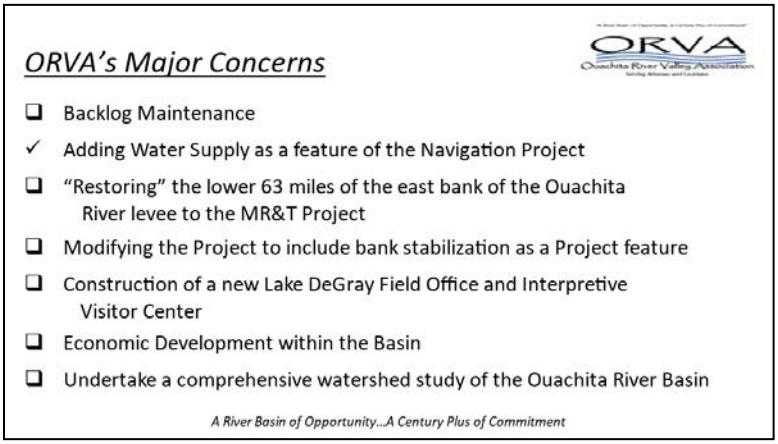
For whatever reason, implementation guidance was never generated by Corps (USACE) headquarters and no feasibility analysis ever conducted. The end result is that the inclusion of the relevant levee section into the MR&T was most likely never considered in the massive Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) that provided billions of dollars in funding for USACE civil works projects. We believe the people of the Ouachita River Basin missed a golden opportunity!

Modifying the Project to add bank stabilization as a Project feature is another major concern of the Association. The Ouachita River levee system is closely associated with navigation, especially south of Monroe, Louisiana, as it provides flood damage reduction which is of paramount importance to ORVA. We are greatly concerned with bank caving and other erosion problems on the Ouachita and Black Rivers in multiple areas. That said, the Vicksburg District continues to support the Tensas Basin Levee District with multiple repairs along the Ouachita River levees as part of this emergency program. The Association is highly pleased with the planned and ongoing repairs at multiple bank caving sites through the PL 84-99 program.

Construction of a new Lake DeGray Field Office and Interpretive Visitor Center remains an ORVA major concern and another project area in which the Corps can make a tremendous difference. Considering the Corps significantly contributes to the economies of Arkansas and Louisiana by supporting the Project in the areas of tourism, recreation, and development, we do not understand why this construction has not been addressed. The Lake DeGray Field Office is the last remaining facility to be replaced at the Vicksburg Districts' Arkansas Lake Projects and has been backlogged for more than ten years. Conservatively estimated at between $4.8-$5M, this construction is sorely needed. It 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.

The Ouachita is critically important to the area economy. In previous statements to the Commission, ORVA has demonstrated how the Ouachita-Black Rivers have impacted the economy of the region. In February 2021, the Environmental Protection Agency Report titled, "Deeper Look at the Ouachita River", details how the river serves as a center for navigation, recreation, economic development, drinking water, and community identity. In a single statement: its' economic value is high! The Association will continue to pursue all avenues of economic development within the basin.

Finally, there is a need to conduct a basin-wide comprehensive study to devise a plan for the development and conservation of water and land resources in Arkansas and Louisiana. A reconnaissance study would serve as a basis for both the Corps of Engineers and other agencies to examine current and future problems and needs related to flood damage reduction, navigation, water supply, bank stabilization, ecosystem restoration, and recreation. This effort would assess the extent of these problems and the federal interest in measures to address them. The Association believes there is a strong probability that several feasibility studies would result from the initial reconnaissance study, especially in the areas of navigation and flood damage reduction.



In summary, we ask for your support and assistance in addressing ORVA's major concerns:

- Increasing funding for backlog maintenance, to include the three Corps lakes
- Restoring the lower 63 miles of the Ouachita River east bank 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
- Supporting the economic development within the Ouachita River Basin
- Undertaking a comprehensive watershed study of the Ouachita River Basin

We are working closely with our Congressional members and are optimistic that some of what has been discussed could be authorized in some future version of WRDA or addressed at the Corps level.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this statement to the members of the Mississippi River Commission. We are proud of our relationship with the Commission and the Vicksburg District and proud to partner with the District on the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project. We look forward to the continued superb working relationship as we work together to further the development of water and land resources projects within 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.

Kristopher C. "KC" Ellis

K.C. is 37 years old and a native of West Monroe, Louisiana. He has 14 years of federal service with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He is a 2002 graduate of West Monroe High School and obtained a welding certification from Delta Trade School. Upon graduation, he worked in private industry until 2007 when he started his career with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as a General Equipment Mechanic for the River Operations Maintenance Section.

KC briefs at the 2022 Red River Valley Association Conference

In 2010 he began working in the Vicksburg District's Monroe Navigation Project Office as a Civil Engineer Technician.

In 2016 he became Chief of Navigation at the Monroe Navigation Project Office. His area of responsibility includes the management of Operations and Maintenance on the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project and the J. Bennett Johnston Waterway: a responsibility quite impressive considering it consists of nine locks and dams, two water control structures and two field offices.

KC is also the voting member for the Vicksburg District on the Mississippi Valley Divisions' Priority of Maintenance (POM) Team. The purpose of the team is to establish and prioritize the maintenance on the Corps' locks and dams within the divisional area of responsibility.

KC has been happily married to Amanda for 11 years. They are blessed with 2 children Katelyn and Reece. K.C. enjoys spending time with family, hunting, and fishing.

KC is a critical piece in the information and coordination efforts between the Vicksburg District and the Ouachita River Valley Association. The Association enjoys a great working relationship with KC and all the Corps' staff at the Monroe Project Navigation Office.

Busy coordinating actions on the Ouachita-Black

Both Camden and Crossett Arkansas have public terminals on the Ouachita River.

Tourists spent more than $6 Billion in Arkansas in 2020; the Ozark and Ouachita Mountain Regions and the Buffalo National River are popular recreational areas.

A Message from Julian Lott, Mayor, City of Camden, Arkansas

The City of Camden wishes to express its' appreciation to the Ouachita River Valley Association (OVRA) for all their support and assistance in helping us navigate through the recent crisis at the Thatcher Lock and Dam. Without ORVA's guidance, we would have been lost; none of us had experienced such low water levels before. We are truly grateful for all their efforts.

The Ouachita River is the heart and soul of Camden. It has always been a driving force for economic development, commercial shipping, and entertainment for the city. From steamboats, to logging, to tourist attractions, the Ouachita River has historically been the center of life for our residents, and we believe that it is still part of the fiber that makes Camden a wonderful city to visit and reside.

We are in the midst of talks regarding how to further utilize the Ouachita and to revamp our parks and walkways along the waterfront. Many people do not realize the impact the river has on our entertainment venues. Camden has hosted numerous fishing tournaments and derbies throughout the years as well as "Movies on the River" at our Amphitheater.

Currently, we are laying the groundwork to repair our beloved Sandy Beach Pavilion – the location of many weddings, family reunions, birthday parties, and get-togethers over the years. We are also strategizing how to best utilize and recreate Sandy Beach Park so that it is once again restored to its former luster and vitality. This will bring even more tourism and entertainment to the banks of the mighty Ouachita.

ORVA's 55th Annual Conference

It has been rumored that the third time is a charm.

The COVID virus – Alpha, Delta, Beta, Omicron, BA.2. What's next?

We're in the thick of the planning process for the ORVA Conference this August 11-12 at the West Monroe Convention Center. We started working the 55th Annual Conference in 2020, shifted to 2021 because of COVID, and at the last moment with a new variant surging, the Directors believed the best course of action was to cancel the 2021 event. But we're rolling now! Dr. Mike Strain, Louisiana Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry has committed to speak at the Dinner Thursday evening, August 11 and State Representative Francis Thompson, widely known for his work in Louisiana agriculture, will make the introduction and provide comments. We have a great lineup of speakers and presenters that will provide meaningful information concerning the Ouachita-Black Rivers and the Ouachita River Basin.

We've built in some substantial "networking" time with fellow conference participants. Experience and feedback have indicated this to be one of the most rewarding of the conference activities. We're also contracting with Dan Blakeney, a premier caterer in West Monroe and Ouachita Parish for some great food options, another key concern for our participants.

Stay tuned for more information about ORVA's Annual Conference 11-12 August 2022 in West Monroe. We're updating our website, and in a few weeks, information concerning the conference will be available on the West Monroe West Ouachita Chamber of Commerce site at https://www.westmonroechamber.org.

"If we can talk, we can solve anything"
-Colonel Robert Hilliard, Commander, Vicksburg District
February 2022, RRVA Conference

The Fight Over Water (Continued from the Fall 2021 Issue)

The Supreme Court of the United States started its Fall term Monday, October 4, 2021, by hearing oral arguments in *Mississippi v. Tennessee*, an interstate dispute over water-use rights, and the first-time states have asked the court to weigh-in on how they should share an interstate aquifer.

The dispute arose out of a Mississippi suit which alleged that the city of Memphis, Tennessee had wrongfully taken water from the Middle Claiborne Aquifer. The aquifer, which spans eight states in the region, is an underground water source which allows for extraction of water.

The Court on Monday, November 22, 2021 unanimously unanimously sided with Tennessee in the groundwater dispute, rejecting Mississippi's claim that Tennessee was stealing its groundwater. The decision was one that legal experts say could have had major implications for future battles over water amid the worsening climate crisis. And as the climate crisis intensifies and droughts worsen, particularly in the western United States, groundwater will only become a more precious resource—and interstate groundwater disputes will likely become more common.

The landmark case stretches back to 2014, when Mississippi sued Tennessee for allegedly stealing its groundwater by allowing a Memphis water utility company to pump from the Middle Claiborne Aquifer, which sits below the Mississippi-Tennessee border. Mississippi argued that it had owned that water since it entered the United States in 1817, and sought $615 million in damages from Tennessee. The key issue was that water lies beneath the boundaries of multiple states. As a result, water can be pumped from a well in Tennessee but come from another state. Therefore, states may feel aggrieved, as Mississippi did, when another state takes water from within their boundaries.

Monday's ruling was the first time the Supreme Court has ever weighed in on the issue of interstate groundwater. The unanimous ruling not only ended Mississippi and Tennessee's

long-running dispute, but also provided a framework for other legal battles that may emerge in the coming decades.

In the decision written by Chief Justice Roberts, it stated that Mississippi is not entitled to exclusive ownership over the water within its boundaries. The court ruled that the legal doctrine of "equitable apportionment – the process to determine who gets what" – which has long been used to determine what states get control of interstate surface water – also applies to groundwater. In other words, the high court ruled that states "have to share." (The term "groundwater" refers to freshwater that's stored beneath the earth's surface. The term "surface water," on the other hand, refers to any body of fresh water that's above ground.) The legal precedent helps bridge the gap between the way litigation has historically treated groundwater and how scientists understand groundwater actually works.

Groundwater makes up about 50% of municipal, domestic and agricultural water supply, per the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

According to one legal expert, if Mississippi had been awarded the damages it sought, groundwater wars would have become very expensive, very fast. Instead, the high burden the Supreme Court set for proving injury in the case, might encourage states to negotiate amongst themselves to share aquifers, rather than immediately heading to court for damages.

The case is significant because the court has never explicitly ruled that underground water is subject to the doctrine of equitable apportionment. Interstate groundwater exists throughout the United States and future disputes will now be governed by this precedent. Importantly, however, the dispute is not entirely resolved.

If Mississippi seeks relief in the case, it must now file under equitable apportionment. Mississippi must prove that Tennessee's use of the water is causing Mississippi significant injury. It is unclear if Mississippi will file a future equitable apportionment suit. In any event, the Nation's highest court has laid the groundwork which will govern the issue.

Photo courtesy of Clay Manly

The Lake Providence Port is an inland shallow-draft port located on the Mississippi River in East Carroll Parish, Louisiana. The Port of Lake Providence is a unique port among Louisiana's network of ports. It is Louisiana's largest inland port (ranking third in operating revenue) and is the second leading Louisiana port in tonnage among the state's network of inland and coastal ports. In fact, it is one of the top 20 U.S. inland ports, shipping more than 1.3 million tons annually.

Lake Greeson

Lake Greeson is one of three lakes located in Southwest Arkansas within the Ouachita River Basin. It is 12 miles long and is surrounded by 15,842 acres of federally administered public lands.

Located on the beautiful Little Missouri River in Pike County, Arkansas, Lake Greeson was built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers between 1947 and 1950 as part of a flood control and hydropower project. Authorized purposes now include recreation, water quality, water supply, conservation and forestry, fish, and wildlife management.

Lake Greeson is a man-made lake and has the only all-concrete dam within the Vicksburg District. It offers a wide variety of recreational opportunities for the entire family: hiking one of the many natural scenic trails, ATV and dirt-bike riding on the Bear Creek Cycle Trail, swimming, boating, or just enjoying the refreshing natural beauty and crystal-clear water of the lake.

Each year, millions of people visit the many public parks, marinas, and campgrounds located around the lake. A tremendous benefit to the economy of the Ouachita River Basin, Lake Greeson offers the very best of Arkansas' natural beauty.

H. K. Thatcher

H.K. Thatcher was born in 1891 on a tributary of the Arkansas River near McCracken, Kansas. Born in a sod house, he grew up in Hannibal, Missouri on the banks of the Mississippi River. An all-American boy, as a youngster he excelled in sports and later at the University of Missouri. He competed against Jim Thorpe and was named to the 1912 U.S. Olympic Track and Field Team as a champion with the discus.

Working most of his life in agriculture, H.K. later became the Director of the Arkansas Agricultural and Industrial Commission. Notable was his assistance to then Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover in the flood rehabilitation work in the White and Cache River Valleys.

Mr. Thatcher, nicknamed "Big Daddy" because of his size and personality, became the Executive Vice President of the

Ouachita River Valley Association in 1950 at the age of 60. In that capacity, he began a commitment to the nine-foot navigation project for the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project. This was H.K.'s greatest challenge. More than 30 years and $252 Million dollars later, the project was finally complete, including four dams, two in Arkansas and two in Louisiana. His commitment to this challenge – this victory – created tremendous economic potential for the people of the Ouachita River Basin.

The northernmost lock on the Ouachita River, H.K. Thatcher Lock and Dam, completed and put in operation in 1984, is named in his honor. It creates a navigable pool all the way to Camden.

Before he died in 1985, Mr. Thatcher also worked to create the 65,000-acre Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge in the Felsenthal Basin in the Ouachita River Basin. He also helped create an additional 12,000-acre refuge along the navigation channel in Louisiana.

Mississippi River Commission Response to ORVA's Written Statement – August 2021

The Association received a written response dated October 22, 2021 to its August 2021 written statement to the Mississippi River Commission (MRC) from Maj Gen Diana Holland, President, MRC. Her response is shown here in its entirety:

Dear Mr. Weeks:

Thank you for your written statement to the Mississippi River Commission for the scheduled August 25, 2021, Low Water Meeting. The Commission appreciates the continued partnership we share with the Ouachita River Valley Association.

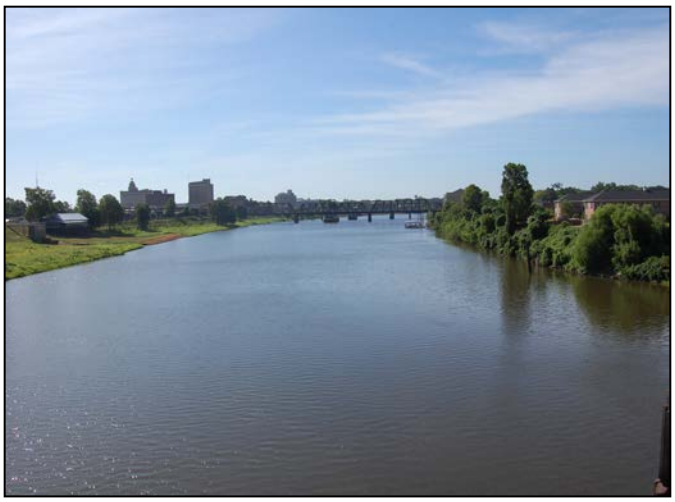
We continue to await implementation guidance from USACE on how to proceed in regard to generating a proposal regarding incorporation of the lower 63 miles of the Ouachita River Levee System as a part of the Mississippi River and Tributary Project. In the meantime, the Vicksburg District continues to support the Tensas Basin Levee District with multiple repairs along the Ouachita River Levees as a part of the P.L. 84-99 Emergency Program.

We appreciate your comments and look forward to hearing from you at future meetings.

Sincerely,

-----Original Signed----

Diana M. Holland
Major General, U.S. Army
President, Mississippi River Commission



The Ouachita River at Monroe, Louisiana

Yes, a picture is worth a thousand words!

These two pictures depict the Ouachita River at Monroe, Louisiana. On the left is a recent photograph take south of Monroe looking north. Below is an artist's renditon of what the River at Monroe would look like if it were not for the Corps' lock and dam systems on the Ouachita River.

The continued maintenance of the locks and dams on the waterway represents a substantial investment for the Army Corps of Engineers. In past years, maintenance of these structures has been lacking due to funding shortfalls. The Corps estimates a $22 Million backlog of maintenance activities for the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project.

These are definitely eye-opending pictures!

Picture of the Ouachita River taken from the Endom Bridge in Monroe, Louisiana in 1919.

The Vicksburg District's River Operations Branch is responsible for channel improvement, dredging, and navigation activities on the lower Mississippi, Red, Ouachita/Black, and Pearl Rivers. This work is accomplished by utilizing specialized floating plant, dustpan and cutterhead dredges, towboats, survey boats, and various other river-related equipment. The scope of work utilizes the latest technology in river engineering and operations.

Membership in the Ouachita River Valley Association

The Ouachita River Valley Association is very interested in membership retention and recruiting new members. Current membership consists of members in the following categories: individual, small business, corporate, civic/professional, public entity, and primary users. Annual dues range from $50 for an individual membership to $2,500 for primary users.

The strength of ORVA is in its membership. That is why it's important to maintain our current membership and grow new members. There is "strength in numbers" and those numbers speak volumes to our elected officials. They know the Association is a non-profit organization that represents the private sector of the economy. They know the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project is a tremendous economic impact to the people of the Ouachita River Basin in Arkansas and Louisiana. They know the Association has a tremendous heritage, a proven record of accomplishments, and a sound reputation for success.

"Partners are important to help secure funding for projects and navigation on the Ouachita-Black."

-Colonel Robert Hilliard, Commander, Vicksburg District
February 2022, Red River Valley Association Conference

There are many reasons for joining ORVA:

-Be part of an organization that has been in existence for 128 years in the development of water and land resources and has a proud record of longevity and accomplishments to include being the organization that represented the voice of the private sector during the planning and construction of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Projects in the mid-twenties (6-½ foot project) and during the 70's-early 80's timeframe (9-foot project) under the unparalleled leadership of Mr. H. K. Thatcher, ORVA Executive Vice President.

-Be part of an Association that is recognized by Congress, Federal, and state agencies as the lead organization that promotes and supports the development of water and land resources throughout the Ouachita River Basin.

-Be part of an Association that makes two visits annually with congressional members representing the Ouachita River Valley in Louisiana and Arkansas to express water and land resources needs. We are an Association of constituents of our elected congressional representatives. Competition for Federal funds is very competitive in today's world, and our voices must be heard.

-Participate in an annual conference that features some of the top experts in the field of water and land resources development. Featured speakers normally include congressional

members, key leaders from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and experts in the fields of navigation, flood control, water supply, recreation and tourism, and fish and wildlife.

-Stay informed of what is going on in the water and land resources development in the Ouachita River Valley through receipt of newsletters, media releases, and the ORVA website.

-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.

-Associate, network, and socialize with like-minded individuals who want to ensure the economy, environment, and quality of life for residents of the Ouachita River Basin are improving on a continuous basis.

Invite a Friend to Become a Member of ORVA

Statement by Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works on the President's Fiscal Year 2023 Budget

On March 30, 2022, the Biden-Harris Administration submitted to Congress the President's Budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2023. The President's Budget details his vision to expand on the historic progress our country has made over the last year and deliver the agenda he laid out in his State of the Union address—to build a better America, reduce the deficit, reduce costs for families, and grow the economy from the bottom up and middle out.

"The Army Civil Works FY 2023 Budget — which on the heels of the transformative investments of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal and the 2022 Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act — continues to focus on investments that yield high economic opportunities to work with disadvantaged communities," said Michael L. Connor, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works.

The Budget makes critical investments in the American people that will help lay a stronger foundation for shared growth and prosperity for generations to come.

At the Army Corps of Engineers Civil Works, the Budget would:

-Increase Resiliency to Climate Change. The Budget invests in improving the Nation's water infrastructure, while incorporating climate resilience efforts into the Corps' commercial navigation, flood and storm damage reduction, and aquatic ecosystem restoration work. It invests in programs that will help local communities identify and address their risks associated with climate change and improve the resilience of Corps infrastructure to climate change, including taking climate resilience into account when selecting projects. The Budget includes technical and planning assistance programs that help local communities identify and address their risks associated with climate change, and incorporate climate resilience into the policy guidance for, and planning of, future projects.

-Support the Administration's Justice40 Initiative through investments in projects that benefit disadvantaged communities by increasing their resilience to climate change. In the FY 2023 Budget, the Corps is committed to securing environmental justice and spurring economic opportunity for disadvantaged communities that have been historically marginalized and overburdened and funds will be used to — 1) improve outreach and access to Civil Works information and resources; 2) improve access to Civil Works technical assistance programs (e.g., Planning Assistance to States and Floodplain Management Services) and maximize the reach of Civil Works projects to benefit the disadvantaged communities, in particular as it relates to climate resiliency; and, 3) ensure any updates to Civil Works policies and guidance will not result in a disproportionate negative impact on disadvantaged communities.

-Facilitate Safe, Reliable and Sustainable Commercial Navigation. The Budget includes over $3 billion for the study, design, construction, operation and maintenance of inland and coastal navigation projects. These significant investments will facilitate safe, reliable, and environmentally sustainable commercial navigation at our Nation's coastal ports and inland waterways.

-Reduce the Risks associated with Riverine and Coastal flooding. The Flood Risk Management program is funded at over $1.5 billion in the FY 2023 Budget. The program is a collaborative effort that integrates the flood risk management projects, programs, and authorities of the Corps with those of other federal agencies, and state, regional and local agencies.

-Restore Aquatic Habitat where the Aquatic Ecosystem Structure, Function and Processes Have Degraded. The FY 2023 Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration program is funded at $624 million in the Budget. The Corps will continue to work with other federal, state and local agencies, using the best available science and adaptive management to restore degraded ecosystem structure, function, and/or process to a more natural condition.

The Budget makes these smart investments while also reducing deficits and improving our country's long-term fiscal outlook.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Civil Works program works with other Federal agencies, and with State, Tribal, and local agencies and others to develop, manage, restore, and protect water resources primarily through the construction, operation and maintenance, and study of water-related infrastructure projects, as well as by regulating development in waters of the United States, and working with other Federal agencies to help communities respond to, and recover from, floods and other natural disasters.

For the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Civil Works Program, the Budget would provide over $6.6 billion in gross discretionary funding that would be distributed among the several appropriations accounts.

The first stationary lock and dams were built on the Ouachita from 1902 to 1926, providing a navigable depth of 6.5 feet from the mouth of the Black River in Louisiana to Camden, Arkansas on the Ouachita River, a distance of 351 miles.

OUACHITA RIVER VALLEY ASSOCIATION (ORVA)
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

I/We hereby subscribe the sum of $_____ annually, payable in advance, for a one-year membership in support of the Ouachita River Valley Association, Inc. (ORVA). This membership becomes effective immediately and will remain in force so long as I/we remain a member/member in good standing and pay the membership dues when due each year.

Name: _____

Contact person (organizations only): _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail address: _____

Telephone Number: _____ Fax Number: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Membership Fees:

____ $ 50 per year (Individual)

____ $ 100 Small Business

____ $ 500 Corporate

_____ $ 200 Civic/Professional

_____ $ 200 Public Entity

_____ $1,250 User Fee

_____ $2,500 Primary User

Please return completed form and cashier's check, money order, or personal check to:

Ouachita River Valley Association
P.O. Box 913
Camden, AR 71711

The Reappearance of the SS Homer

The *SS Homer* was a sidewheel paddle steamer which plied the waters of the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Built in 1859 in Parkersburg, West Virginia for $30,000, she was a 194-ton sidewheel packet measuring 148 feet long, 28 feet wide, and 5 feet deep. Its co-owners were Levi Hopkins of Mason County, Virginia, and his father-in-law, stock dealer and farmer William H. Neale of Parkersburg.

Neale and Hopkins sold the *Homer* in the spring of 1860 to Samuel Applegate and James Parsons soon after it was enrolled at the Port of New Orleans, Louisiana, where Applegate, who served as the ship's master, ran it on the Red and Ouachita rivers as a regular mail packet. Ambrose W. Skardan bought out Applegate's two-thirds interest in the vessel in 1861.

In 1861, after the start of the American Civil War, the *Homer* was contracted to the government of the Confederate States of America, and was used to transport men and war material on the Mississippi, Red, and Ouachita Rivers.

The *Homer* carried personnel and materials up the Mississippi to the Rebel defenders of Port Hudson, Louisiana, and various places on the Red and Ouachita rivers throughout 1863 and early 1864. Its role was not an uncommon one after Federal forces captured New Orleans, as commercial trade became both rare and risky as Federal forces pressed westward.

It was far up the Ouachita River, about thirty miles below Camden in Ouachita County, when it was captured by troops of Major General Frederick Steele's Federal army during the 1864 Camden Expedition.

The Plan

On March 23, 1864, Steele departed Little Rock with his federal column of around 7,000 soldiers, heading south as part of a pincer movement. The goal was to link up with Major General Nathaniel Banks who was heading northward from Alexandria, Louisiana. The planned operation was for the two pincers to meet on the Red River at Shreveport, Louisiana for a combined drive into Texas.

Although his columns were moving, General Steele was reluctant to participate in the operation considering the poor roads of southern Arkansas and a poor supply line. Steele also knew his foraging parties would find little food along the way thanks to Confederate cavalry who constantly patrolled the area. Adding to his woes was the fact that expected reinforcements would not materialize in a timely manner. Compounding these problems, was the fact that Steele had little faith in the planned operation or in his counterpart General Banks.

Steele's army skirmished heavily with Confederate troops during the march south at Elkin's Ferry on April 3-4 and Prairie D'Ane on April 9. Receiving word that Banks' defeat in Louisiana at Mansfield and Pleasant Hill, south of Shreveport on April 8 and 9 were true, Steele abandoned the drive towards the Red River and headed toward Camden. Steele was short of food and forage for the animals; he had no base of supplies and Confederate cavalry and infantry were active in the area.

Steele finally received reinforcements with the arrival of an additional Federal column from Fort Smith. However, the additional troops only exasperated his supply situation. They now faced a real prospect of starvation. Rations were cut and then cut once more.

Reaching Camden on April 15, supplies of breadstuffs were exhausted; his hungry troops were down to one-fourth rations. Steele sent foraging expeditions into the country around Camden but Confederate cavalry ambushed them at Poison Spring on April 18 and defeated another column bringing food from Pine Bluff at Marks' Mills on April 25.

With his attempted resupply operation thwarted at Marks' Mills, Steele decided to abandon Camden. He must retreat to Little Rock before his army was destroyed.

As the fortunes of war would have it, a detachment of Federal cavalry captured the *Homer* around thirty miles below Camden and piloted her to the city. She held between 4,000 and 5,000 bushels of corn and other quartermaster and commissary supplies which were swiftly consumed by the starving Federal soldiers.

The Yankee Army abandoned Camden on the night of April 26, 1864 heading for Little Rock, but not before troops abandoned or destroyed equipment and supplies that could not be transported. The *Homer* and other ships were scuttled to keep her from falling into Confederate hands.

With the Confederate forces on the opposite side of the Ouachita closing in but with no means of crossing, they turned to the *Homer* to solve their problem. Much of the *Homer's* cabin remained above water and Southern soldiers began salvaging her 10′ x 12′ heavy wooden planks. Hammering and lashing the planks into a crude bridge, Confederate forces were finally able on the morning of April 28 to cross the Ouachita River and resume their pursuit of Steele's Federal column. After a savage battle at Jenkins' Ferry on April 30, Steele narrowly managed to get his army across the swollen Saline River and complete the retreat to Little Rock.

When water levels dropped drastically at Camden this past fall due to an issue with the hinge crest gate at the Thatcher Lock (some 52 river miles below Camden), you could see a large pile of bricks in the river at the Sandy Beach Park on the east side of Camden. Archeological experts were sure this was a part of the *Homer's* remains. The bricks were believed to be the "flame bed" which was a platform of bricks that would be placed under the ships boilers to keep the heat and sparks from the wooden hull.

The *Homer* shipwreck site was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on September 14, 2002. The site preserves important information, both historically and archeologically, but still, there are questions that remain:

- Why was the *Homer* operating on the Ouachita so near to Steele's army?
- Was it truly luck that Federal cavalry captured the *Homer* or could it have been planned?
- Could it be possible that the loyalties of the pilot and crew of the *Homer* remained with the Union?
- How could the Confederate cavalry – the eyes and ears of the army – not have communicated effectively with the *Homer*?
- Was it pure coincidence that the *Homer* was loaded with corn and other commissary supplies?
- How could this have happened; did they (the Confederates) not know the plight of the Union army – so near starvation and almost ready to surrender?

We may never know the answers to these questions but we are certain of at least two things:

- General Steele was lucky; the *Homer's* cargo of corn and other supplies saved his army, and
- Steele forgot the idiom phrase and military maxim attributed to both Frederick the Great and Napoleon many decades earlier (and which still holds true today), "an army marches on its stomach."

A year later in May 1865, with the depletion of food and supplies, life in Arkansas became about survival rather than war. Approximately 10,000 Arkansans, over twelve percent of Arkansas's men between the ages of fifteen and forty, lost their lives during the war.

Soldier from the Louisiana National Guard patrolling the levee along the Ouachita River near Monroe, Louisiana – 1958.

The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) 2007 "reinstated" some 52 miles of Ouachita River levee to the Mississippi River and Tributairies (MR&T) Project. ORVA continues to push to reinstate the lower 63 miles south of Monroe, LA to Caldwell Parish.

The Ouachita River Bank Stabilization & Levee Rehabilitation Project

Luhr Brothers, Inc. completed the Monroe Floodwall project (as it is known locally) earlier this spring, beating the May 30, 2022 contract end period. The revised $33.1M contract, administered by the Vidalia Area Office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, was awarded in late August 2018. Start date for the contract was delayed, however, until

January 2020 due to the emergency closure of the Columbia Lock. Throughout the execution of the contract, Luhr Brothers battled delays due to high water during winter and spring periods and then battled delays due to low water. Mother nature always has the last vote. Some 727,551 tons of stone ("A" and "C") was placed on the project.

The purpose of the contract was to stabilize portions of the Ouachita River embankment to prevent erosion and bank caving. It was funded under the auspices of the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project.

Funds Status

With the start of the 2022 fiscal year this past October, none of the 12 appropriations bills were signed into law. As has been the case for the last several years, Congress passed several short-term extensions to buy the lawmakers extra time to enact an already overdue federal spending package for FY 2022. The extensions were necessary to keep the government funded and operational. President Biden finally signed the FY 2022 Omnibus Appropriations Bill on March 15, 2022.

Although the federal spending package was yet to be enacted, the President signed into law the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in November 2021 which provided $17 billion in funding to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) civil works projects.

USACE had 60 days to submit their spend plan to Congress on the FY 2022 projects to be funded.

High water movement. Photo courtesy of Clay Manly.

The Corps' plan was submitted to Congress on Friday, January 14 and was publicly released on January 19. In the plan, the IIJA provides $17.1 billion for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Civil Works programs, projects, and activities (68% for construction; 23% for operations and maintenance (O&M) and 5% for the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project) stretched over the current (FY 2022) and next two fiscal years. The IIJA spend plan allocates approximately $10.5 billion of the $17.1 billion for FY 2022.

Without the IIJA, the Corps' Civil Works Program was set to experience a 13% reduction in funding from FY 2021 to FY 2022. With IIJA, according to Al Lee, Director of Civil Works, "this funding provides USACE with a once-in-a-generation window of opportunity to deliver water resource infrastructure programs and projects that will positively impact the lives of our communities across the Nation."

Under IIJA, USACE was tasked to determine which projects would be funded.

With the IIJA Spend Plan For O&M in FY 2022, Blakely Mountain Dam and Lake Ouachita will receive $2.24M, DeGray Lake $1.635M, and Narrows Dam/Lake Greeson $2.211M. The Ouachita and Black Rivers will receive $3.915M.

The summary of work for the Ouachita-Black includes replacing barriers at Moon Lake Recreation Area, silt removal from recreation areas, repair of the H.K. Thatcher Lock and Dam hinge crest gate, and repair/replace Felsenthal Lock and Dam tainter gate.

We may not see the repairs at Thatcher, however, until FY 2024. It is estimated the repairs will cost upwards of $4M. See page XX for more on this topic.

Data for the President's Budget for FY 2023 with totals for FY 2022 and FY 2021 are shown here for comparison:

President's Budget for Fiscal Year 2023
for the Army Corps of Engineers Civil Works Program (shown for comparison)

FY 2023
(in $ Millions)

Category	Opns	Maint	FY 23	FY 22	FY 21
Blakely Mountain Dam and Lake Ouachita, AR	4.990	3.038	8.028	8.028	8.285
DeGray Lake, AR	3.527	2.918	6.445	6.587	6.605
Narrows Dam and Lake Greeson, AR	3.759	1.741	5.500	5.691	5.861
Total of the Corps Lakes	**12.276**	**7.697**	**19.973**	**19.738**	**20.741**
Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project	$ 5.924	4.093	**10.017**	12.065	$ 7.625

The FY 2022 funding in $ Millions is shown here:

FY 2022
(in $ Millions)

Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project	Opns	Maint	**Total**
Ouachita and Black Rivers, AR and LA	$ 5.363	6.702	**$ 12.065**

ORVA estimated the minimum annual requirement as early as FY 2018 for the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project to be $10.7M in Operations and Maintenance. No inflationary factor has been applied to that estimate; buying power has been substantially degraded in the past 6 years due to inflation. (The 2021 calendar year inflation percentage was forecasted at 8.5% alone.)

Focusing solely on the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project and considering FY 2021 funding was a total of $7.625M, the FY 2022 funding picture was the best it had been in recent memory.

The funding outlook for FY 2023 represents a slight increase in funding for operations but an almost 40% reduction in maintenance funding. This reduction in maintenance funding raised some concerns. This outlook would be serious were it not for the influx of funding due to the IIJA funding package.

Remember, the two locks and dams in Arkansas are 40 years old and the two locks in Louisiana are 50 years old. The issue with the leak in the hinge crest gate at H.K. Thatcher Lock and Dam is only an example of a lack of maintenance for the Project over the years. The Vicksburg District reacted quickly this past fall to address the loss of pool at Thatcher. A second-order effect could have had dire consequences to the water intake at Camden Water Utilities (some 52 river miles away) which supports the City of Camden and most of Ouachita County.

Fiscal Year 2023 projections are high compared to previous years. And although the Project received a substantial increase in funding in FY 2022 over FY 2021 levels, it still faces a lack of funding for backlog maintenance. These maintenance costs, like interest, continue to accrue.

Overall, the funding outlook appears much better than it has in previous years. ORVA also learned that for the FY 2024 President's Budget, the Vicksburg District is submitting under the navigation business line, a total of $41.4M in work packages. Of that total, $34.3 is for backlog maintenance. Remember also, the budgetary submission still has several widgets it must pass through before it becomes reality. Much can happen in the next year to effect budgetary decisions. That said, ORVA will continue to discuss funding, among other things, with its Congressional delegations.

Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) 2022

The Association forwarded information mid-February for our Congressional delegations to begin working WRDA 2022. This initial step, followed by submission to the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works (EPW), will begin laying the groundwork for project and/or policy requests for inclusion in the bill.

ORVA submitted two requests, both Project Modification Requests and major ORVA concerns:

-Modify the Ouachita River Levee Project and its Components (Columbia Ring Levee, the Bawcomville Ring Levee, and the folding Monroe Floodwall) to include it as part of the

Mississippi River & Tributaries (MR&T) Project. In simple terms, it restores the lower 63 miles, at and below Monroe, LA to Caldwell Parish where the majority of erosion and damage occurs and places that portion of the levee system under federal authority for maintenance and repair. The Association has presented this issue many times and will continue to do so until it gains some traction.

-Modify the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project to include bank stabilization as a project feature. Bank caving and other erosion problems occur all along the Ouachita and Black Rivers and threaten to cause catastrophic flooding and hinder navigation. The Corps does substantially address this issue (with the availability of emergency funding) through the Public Law (PL) 84-99 program, but it is really a band-aid approach to the much bigger issue. (For example, a bank caving problem linked to 2018 high-water event may not be addressed until 2022; what was then a $50,000 issue ("fix") is now a $400,000 issue.) This modification of the Project to include bank stabilization as a Project feature places it under federal authority for maintenance and repair.

A Chronology of Events at H.K. Thatcher Lock and Dam

In late October 2021, Engineers discovered loss of pool at the Thatcher Lock and Dam. Investigation later revealed the loss of pool due to a leak in the seal of the hinge crest gate.

After closer scrutiny, Vicksburg District Engineers determined there was no danger to the integrity of the structure but the leak would cause Thatcher's pool to continue to fall until the pool reached 71 ft elevation, which is the bottom elevation of the gate. Once the pool reached that level, engineers planned to view and inspect the structure to gain a better understanding of the issue.

The initial concept of the operation: to determine damage, put a plan in place for an immediate fix, and commence repairs once the gate seal is exposed. Once in effect, the Corps could begin immediate repairs to bring pool back to normal pool elevation, i.e., 77 ft.

The Ouachita at Camden after the loss of pool at Thatcher

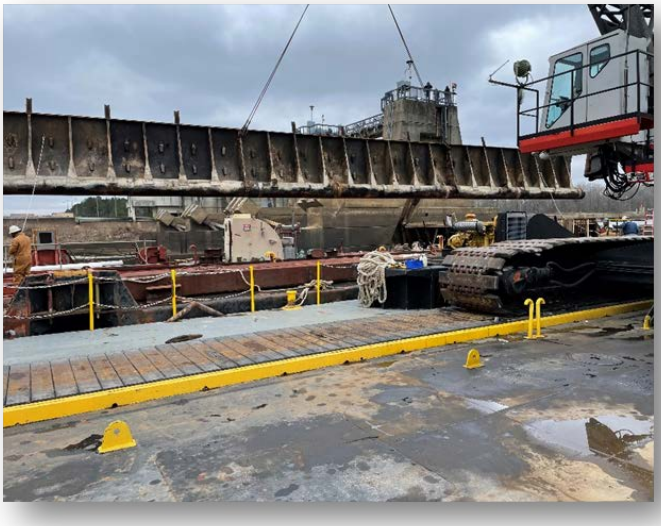
Of immediate concern – the secondary effect of the loss of pool at Thatcher, some 52 river miles distant – was the threat of loss of water supply at Camden. Camden Water Utilities supported (and continued to support) five water associations and the City of Camden through two intake structures; supplying an average of 3 million gallons of water per day (mgd) to 20,200 customers.

Early to mid-November saw the pool elevation at the Camden gauge fluctuating due to increased rainfall and the drawdown of Lake Hamilton by Entergy's hydropower operations. However, the Corps still needed to draw down the pool at Thatcher to begin repair of the leak in the seal of the hinge crest gate.

Once it was determined that the City of Camden Water Supply was prepared and materials in place to inspect and potentially repair, the drawdown would begin. After the gate became exposed, USACE initiated inspections to determine what was necessary for either a temporary or permanent fix. If possible, repairs will be made immediately, and the pool raised back to normal pool elevations.

It was at this time that the Corps determined to install a “Poiree needle system” and immediately began planning for the execution of that system.

The District began drawing down pool at Thatcher on November 19.



Picture above of the removal of the leaking hinged crest gate from the Thatcher Lock and Dam. A “Poiree needle system” supported by thick steel I-beams is in place until a replacement hinged crest gate arrives.

Water customers were “out of the water” so to speak. No longer did the City of Camden and water customers within Ouachita County have fear of degradation to its water supply nor any impact to water usage! Planning, coordination and communication by and with the Vicksburg District, Mayor Lott and his administration, Camden Water Utilities, ORVA, and other stakeholders had paid off.

The successful installation of the “Poiree needle system” at Thatcher, was completed on 28 November with the pool level at 72 ft, allowing for repairs to begin. The District began close and continuous inspection.

Poiree, a French engineer, devised the movable frame weir in 1834 which bears his name. It can be lowered so as to leave the whole width of the river free from obstruction.

In February this year, the “Poiree needle system” was fortified to create what the Corps determined to be a “long-term temporary” fix.

Although the Corps will receive additional funding through the Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act, timing proved to be an issue for the submission of funding for a permanent fix at Thatcher at this time. It is anticipated that, with the necessary funding in place, a permanent fix will take place during Fiscal Year 2024.

Water levels reached 81 ft at the Thatcher Lock and Dam on March 25, the threshold to shut down navigation as a safety measure. Per normal operations, the District placed a buoy line across the river, the length of the dam, to make the high water hazard visible to boats, fisherman, and other members of the public using the waterway.

There are currently no restrictions and navigation is open at Thatcher. The “Poiree needle system” held during the heavy spring rains and river rise.

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