



# ORVA NEWS

## Ouachita River Valley Association

*"Dedicated to Quality of Life in the Ouachita Valley"*

### Spring 2024

ORVA is a 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.

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Executive Director: David Weeks,  
david.weeks.ORVA@outlook.com; 318-366-3834

## Spring 2024

### Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project

Spring is here! With it, the annual rainfall we missed during the long, hot summer period (which lasted well into December) has finally arrived! And with it, comes high water. It's a never-ending cycle: low water followed by high water with a brief dredging period sandwiched in between. The dredging season will be short and, unfortunately, we'll only see dredging operations in Louisiana. We still have a mussel issue, due to a request for a more in-depth study of several threatened and endangered species of mussel on the Ouachita above the state line. Apparently, they're homesteading on the Ouachita River in that location. It's highly doubtful we will see any resolution on the mussel issue in time for any dredging operations this season. Needless to say, without dredging, we can't begin to seriously talk about shipping on the river and the economic development that is associated with the waterway.

We continue to see increased tonnage on the Ouachita from Monroe south. The long, dry summer drought as well as the current high water has had no effect on movement on the river. We'll discuss that in this newsletter as well as dredging, funding, requests for consideration in the Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA), ORVA's concerns, recent testimony to the Mississippi River Commission, and several ORVA initiatives: designation of the Ouachita River as a Marine Highway and a sister "MR&T-like" channel improvement program. There are several other bits of information and articles you will find interesting such as an update on the H.K. Thatcher Lock and Dam, a Lake Ouachita report and several "groundbreaking" articles. And, the Ouachita River has made the Top 10! Top 10 that is, in alligator infested rivers within the United States!

Be sure to mark your calendars for **September 19-20, 2024**. ORVA's 57th Annual Convention which will be held in West Monroe.

Representatives of the Ouachita River Valley Association traveled to Washington DC this past March 2024 to meet with its congressional delegation. Several items of interest were discussed and requests for assistance and support made in obtaining funding for the following:

- Backlog Maintenance, to include the three Corps lakes
- Modification of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project to include bank stabilization as a project feature
- Placing the lower 63 miles of the east bank of the Ouachita River levee into an “MR&T-like” authority
- Giving strong consideration to constructing a Field Office and Interpretive Visitor Center at Lake DeGray, Arkansas
- Undertaking a comprehensive watershed study of the Ouachita River Basin.
- Ensuring dredging, which in turn aids in navigation and creates economic opportunities
- Designating the Ouachita River as a Marine Highway: Marine Highway M-165

**Statement to the Mississippi River Commission – April 5, 2024 – Greenville, Mississippi**

ORVA Executive Director, Mr. David Weeks, presented both verbal and written testimony to the Mississippi River Commission on April 10, 2024. The statement presented on the behalf of ORVA members is presented below in its entirety.



April 5, 2024

Mississippi River Commission  
ATTN: Edie Whittington  
Post Office Box 80  
Vicksburg, Mississippi 39181-0080

General Peoples and Members of the Mississippi River Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity and privilege to present this written testimony on behalf of the members of the Ouachita River Valley Association.

The Association’s mission, major interests, and major concerns remain unchanged. For the sake of brevity, I will not address our mission and interests here, but provide a summary of those concerns and actions which have transpired since our last written testimony presented to the Commission.

As you noted in your October 11, 2023 response to our previous written testimony, we are quite concerned with dredging and backlog maintenance. While dredging operations in the lower regions of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project (Project) have been consistent throughout this past summer, we are concerned with those operations which have been nonexistent in the northern reaches. The Ouachita still has a mussel problem in Arkansas. The lack of dredging operations above the state line have been nonexistent for the past decade.

As you are most likely aware, several threatened and/or endangered species of mussel discovered in 2022 have stymied efforts to dredge portions of the Ouachita above the state line. Although clearing and snagging operations were accomplished this past October in anticipation of follow-on dredging, we now understand that a more detailed environmental study has been proposed. We are hopeful that a decision will soon be reached concerning dredging operations, but doubtful it will occur this construction season. As you know, dredging in the northern regions would restore the authorized channel all the way to Camden, Arkansas, the head of navigation. We believe it would, in turn, support economic development in the area. If we are to see a thriving economy in this area, it is critical we open and maintain this crucial interstate highway system all the way to Camden.

Backlog maintenance remains a concern for the Association. Funding in the civil works budgets for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project has fluctuated and has reflected downward trends in recent year considering the loss of buying power. Though funding jumped somewhat from 2023 to 2024 and funding from additional sources in 2022 served to address some of the growing backlog issues, we remained concerned it was still not enough considering the aging infrastructure of the Corps' locks and dams. (The Arkansas and Louisiana locks and dams are ~ 40 and 50 years old, respectively.) The locks and dams simply cannot afford to fail due to lack of maintenance. That said, Felsenthal Lock and Dam did see some backlog maintenance this past November and it's anticipated we will see additional maintenance the remainder of this fiscal year. It is our understanding that the Vicksburg District has submitted \$34.3M in work packages for backlog maintenance.

The Association continues to press our congressional delegation concerning the modification of the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project to include the portion of the Ouachita River Levee System (the lower 63 miles of the east bank of the Ouachita River levee system) at and below Monroe, Louisiana to Caldwell Parish, Louisiana. As you are well aware, the 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 Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project. The WRDA 2007 did not reinstate the lower 63 miles of the east bank south where the majority of erosion and damage occurs.

It is ORVA's opinion that the Project (now almost 100 years old) is incomplete. It should not be piecemealed, and should be fully restored to the original intent of the Flood Control Act of 1928. All segments of the levee project need to be classified as part of the MR&T Project. We are also of the opinion that removal (the "deauthorization") of the lower 63 was implemented in error. We have consistently lobbied for the lower 63 to be authorized (or restored) to the MR&T Program. With that said, the Association has initiated coordination with the Army Corps to begin a request for a "sister" channel improvement program. This program – which would be an "MR&T-like" program – is intended to bring the remainder of the Project under federal authority. We have requested legislative drafting services for a new authority, i.e., an "MR&T-like" channel

improvement program. During our recent visit to Washington, we discussed this “MR&T-like” program with our congressional delegation. We remain hopeful that we can accomplish bringing the lower 63 under federal authority.

Closely associated with the concern discussed above, ORVA has requested the modification of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project to include bank stabilization as a feature of the Project. We are greatly concerned with bank caving and other erosion problems on the Ouachita and Black Rivers in multiple areas. This problem is not only confined to Louisiana, but reaches well into the upper Ouachita, especially in the Camden, Arkansas area and north. Clearing and snagging operations (executed in anticipation of dredging operations) in the northern reaches this past year revealed substantial bank caving and erosion issues.

The Corps expends tremendous energy and resources addressing bank stabilization through the PL 84-99 Project, mostly in those 63 miles. Multiple sites in Ouachita and Caldwell Parishes in Louisiana have been repaired, several obligated, and still more submitted for this program. Thanks to our partners in the Tensas Basin Levee District, these issues are identified, detailed, and submitted to the Vicksburg District, who work in unison to address those bank caving and erosion issues. These issues far exceed the financial capability of the levee district to maintain to any acceptable standard. As you are aware, funding for these issues through the PL 84-99 Project is very limited and must be linked to a high-water event. In most every case, they are not addressed in a timely manner. As the erosion or bank caving issue at the site continues to grow through time, so does the corresponding cost to repair. Modification of the Project to include bank stabilization as a project feature places it under federal authority for maintenance and repair. Though the Vicksburg District has done an exceptional job addressing bank caving and other erosion issues, PL 84-99 remains an inefficient use of taxpayer resources.

The Construction of a new Lake DeGray Field Office and Interpretive Visitor Center remains an ORVA concern. The Corps’ lakes significantly contribute to the economy of Arkansas, and the Hot Springs community in particular, in the areas of tourism, recreation, and development. The Lake DeGray Field Office, inextricably linked to the Hot Springs economy, is the last remaining facility to be replaced at the Vicksburg Districts’ Arkansas Lake Projects. The Association recently met with and discussed this new construction with the Vicksburg District Commander and our Arkansas delegation. All are well aware of our concern. A new Field Office and Interpretive Visitor Center represents a win-win for the Corps, the region, and area visitors, not to mention the safety and health of Corps employees.

The Association believes we must Implement a Section 729 Study vice Section 216 to study the water resources needs of the Ouachita River Watershed in Arkansas and Louisiana. With the last river basin study conducted more than 120 years ago, much has changed in the Ouachita River basin. A real need exists 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. This study, supported by numerous stakeholders and environmental associations, would also 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. A detailed study of the river, last conducted in 1902, would serve to address the many diverse social, environmental, and economic needs of this important watershed.

Established in 1862 after the Federals captured the strategic city of New Orleans, the Confederate navy yard at Shreveport, Louisiana constructed the ironclad *CSS Missouri* and several smaller “torpedo” boats. They were never engaged in battle. The navy yard also outfitted, repaired, and supplied several Confederate naval and army warships, including the *CSS W.H. Webb*, and the smaller army vessels *Mary T*, and *Grand Duke*. The commander, First Lieutenant Jonathan H. Carter surrendered the yard to federal troops on June 3, 1865, along with the ironclad *Missouri* and several army transports. Federal forces occupied the yard on June 7.

The Association recently consulted with representatives of the U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration (MARAD) and the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) concerning designating the Ouachita River as a Marine Highway. This consult came after discussions with members of Congressman Bruce Westerman’s staff, the most recent at the 2023 ORVA Convention in Hot Springs and again this past month with members of our Arkansas and Louisiana congressional delegation.

ORVA proposes to designate the Ouachita River as Marine Highway M-165. The designation of the Ouachita as a marine highway brings visibility for interstate commerce and federal funding. We believe the designation will greatly benefit the people of the Ouachita River basin.

The Ouachita River is critically important to area economies. The river is an interstate highway which serves as the center for navigation, recreation, economic development, drinking water, and community identity. Its economic value is high and its impact continues to grow! The Project is more important than ever to the welfare and economic success of the Basin. For example, this past June the Columbia Port Commission in Caldwell Parish, Louisiana announced it will receive \$10.5M, for the Ouachita River and Louisiana Highway 165 Multimodal Connectivity and Safety Project. The project will fund land acquisition and construction activities for a Truck Parking Facility located near the inland Port of Columbia, Ouachita River, and Louisiana State Highway 165. News of this grant comes on the heels of a Louisiana DOTD \$15M grant for infrastructure improvement projects at the Port of Columbia. These grants are designed to support the Louisiana Green Fuels (LGF) Project, currently under construction by Louisiana-based green energy supplier Strategic Biofuels. The \$2.8B LGF Project will be the first renewable diesel project in North America to achieve “negative” carbon emissions. The Association will continue to pursue and support all avenues of economic development within the basin.

Thank you for the opportunity and privilege to present this Statement to the Commission on behalf of the members of the Ouachita River Valley Association. We look forward to a continued relationship with our Corps partners at the Mississippi River Commission, the Mississippi Valley Division, and the Vicksburg District; a relationship based on a shared, working, and mutual understanding of the issues affecting the Project and the people within the Ouachita River Basin.

Please contact me at [david.weeks.ORVA@outlook.com](mailto:david.weeks.ORVA@outlook.com) or via mobile phone at 318-366-3834 if I can be of assistance or answer any questions. Again, thank you for the opportunity to present a statement on behalf of the members of our Association.

Sincerely and respectfully,

David L. Weeks  
Executive Director

**Tonnage Report**



Fuel barges headed back south.  
Photo courtesy of Clay Manly.

Tonnage data for calendar year 2023 is depicted below. In our previous discussion of tonnage, we anticipated, with the current glide path, that we would reach the one million metric ton mark. At the end of the third quarter, tonnage exceeded that mark by 180,000 tons. Using the nine months data as a guide, we predicted tonnage for the calendar year to reach 1.4 million metric tons. Tonnage data for calendar year 2023, however, exceeded all expectations! Tonnage for calendar year 2023 more than doubled the calendar year 2022 tonnage of 796,000 metric tons and reached a five-year high of 1.7 million metric tons. Data for calendar year 2023 is depicted here:

<b>Calendar Year 2023</b>			
Commodity	Upbound (KTONS)	Downbound (KTONS)	Total YTD (KTONS)
Gasoline Incl Aviation (incl Jet)	434.800		434.800
Residual Fuel Oil	412.800		412.800
Fertilizers	24.900		24.900
Limestone, Sand, and Gravel	647.000		647.000
Soybeans		87.968	87.968
Corn		79.952	79.952
Machinery/Bulkheads (Not Electric)	15.805	6.640	22.445
Other	1.155	.101	1.256
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,536.460</b>	<b>174.661</b>	<b>1,711.121</b>

The numbers presented in the graphs represent “Upbound” and “Downbound” tonnage (reflected in thousands of metric tons) on the Ouachita at the Jonesville Lock.

The majority of tonnage can be attributed to the northbound movement of fuel and rock. Fuel shipments have increased substantially over 2022 levels and should continue to increase or (at least) remain at a steady-state in the future. In addition, the movement of rock north continues at a tremendous pace and should continue for the next 36-42 months. The rock can be attributed to gravel surfacing of the Ouachita River Levee System south of Monroe, Louisiana and bank stabilization projects submitted by the Tensas Basin Levee District. The Vicksburg District supports many of those projects through the Public Law (PL) 84-99 Project. Tonnage levels should be well above the 1 million Metric Ton levels in future years which should lead to favorable levels of funding.



Shipment of rock headed towards Monroe, Louisiana in support of one of many PL 84-99 Projects.

Photo courtesy of Clay Manly.



Considering total tonnage for calendar year 2022 was 796,000 metric tons, the data reflected above is quite impressive.

The movement of rock continues at a steady pace. Much of the rock is used for gravel surfacing of the Ouachita River Levee System. The majority, however, can be attributed to the Vicksburg District’s aggressive support of bank stabilization through the Public Law (PL) 84-99 Project.

**Jeffrey Martin “Jeff” Landry** is the 57th Governor of the State of Louisiana. He was elected October 14, 2023 in a historic primary victory. Governor Landry assumed office on January 8, 2024.

### Dredging

Much credit for unobstructed shipping can be attributed to the Vicksburg District and their steadfast support in maintaining a navigable waterway – helping to keep product moving on this crucial interstate highway system through dredging operations. Operations were consistent throughout the hot, dry summer and into the fall. Low water conditions in November and December 2023 did not have the impact that low water had on the Mississippi and Red. In addition, the recent high water has had no effect on shipping operations. The bottom line: funding was available and dredging operations from Monroe, Louisiana south on the Ouachita-Black were exceptional in 2023.



The Ouachita, though, still has a mussel problem in its northern reaches. Several threatened and endangered species of mussel discovered in late 2022 have stymied efforts to dredge portions of the Ouachita above the state line. We are hopeful that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFS), with input from the Vicksburg District environmental staff and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, will reach an amicable decision concerning dredging operations on the upper Ouachita. We are hopeful that dredging operations will reach full approval but compromises were alluded to in earlier discussions with Vicksburg District staff. Clearing and snagging operations above the state line concluded October 31, 2023, what we thought were hopeful indicators of a positive decision. Dredging in the northern regions would restore the authorized channel all the way to Camden, Arkansas, the head of navigation. We’re hopeful that it would, in turn, support economic development in the area.

Photo courtesy of Clay Manly.

Monroe-West Monroe: known locally as the Twin Cities are twice the fun, food, and entertainment.

Richard “Dick” Taylor, the son of President Zachary Taylor, moved to Louisiana in 1850 and became a sugar planter. Taylor’s Louisiana Confederate service cemented his ties to the Pelican State. In 1862, General Taylor took charge of the small number of Confederate troops in Louisiana. Two years later, his soldiers halted Union General Nathaniel Banks’ Red River Campaign at the Battles of Mansfield and Pleasant Hill, abruptly ending plans to capture Shreveport, Louisiana. Taylor’s victory was the last major Confederate triumph by a Confederate Army in the Civil War. Both Mansfield and Pleasant Hill recently celebrated the 160th anniversary of those battles.



**Construction of a new Lake DeGray Field Office and Interpretive Visitor Center** remains an ORVA concern.

The Corps’ lakes significantly contribute to the economy of Arkansas, and the Hot Springs community in particular, in the areas of tourism, recreation, and development. Tourism, Arkansas’ second largest industry, continues to grow with sales topping \$6B, employing 120,000 people, and generating more than \$500M in tax revenue. The Lake DeGray Field Office, linked to the Hot Springs economy, is the last remaining facility to be replaced at the Vicksburg Districts’ Arkansas Lake Projects. The location and construction of this facility has been

elusive for the past several years. Rather than seeking a new site for the Lake DeGray Field Office and Interpretive Visitor Center, the construction of this new facility should be considered at its current location. The Corps can make a real difference here. A new Field Office and Interpretive Visitor Center represents a win-win for the Corps, the region, and area visitors, not to mention the safety and health of Corps employees.

**Funds Status.**

President’s Budget for Fiscal Year 2025  
for the Army Corps of Engineers Civil Works Program

(With FY2021, FY2022, FY 2023, and FY2024 shown for comparison)

FY 2025 (in \$ Millions)

Category	FY 2025 Opns	FY 2025 Maint	FY 2025 Totals	FY 2024	FY 2023	FY 2022	FY 2021
Blakely Mountain Dam and Lake Ouachita, AR	5.415	3.174	8.688	7.853	8.028	8.028	8.285
DeGray Lake, AR	4.651	2.769	7.420	7.216	6.445	6.587	6.605
Narrows Dam and Lake Greeson, AR	4.399	2.509	6.908	6.130	5.500	5.691	5.861
<b>Total of the Corps Lakes</b>	<b>14.564</b>	<b>8.452</b>	<b>23.016</b>	<b>21.199</b>	<b>19.973</b>	<b>20.306</b>	<b>20.751</b>

<b>Ouachita-Black Rivers</b>	<b>6.958</b>	<b>9.167</b>	<b>16.125</b>	<b>11.607</b>	<b>10.017</b>	<b>12.065</b>	<b>7.625</b>
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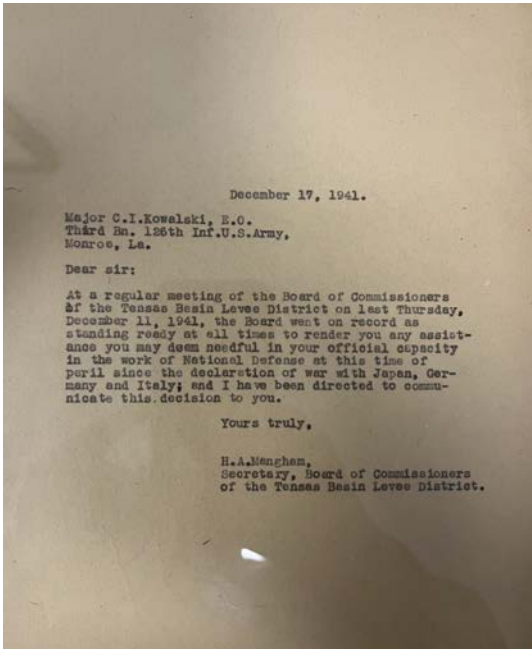
<b>Navigation Project</b>							
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Initial thoughts for the FY 2024 funding picture were good, but not great. Considering the current 8% inflation we're experiencing and overall prices are upwards of 13% higher than just two years ago, funding is on par with FY 2023; perhaps slightly lower. Unfortunately, no funding data is available for FY 2025. The President's Budget for FY 2025 continues the trend; somewhat numerically higher but lower due to the loss of real buying power.

We originally reported in the Spring 2023 issue of the newsletter that the Vicksburg District is addressing the backlog issue. You may recall that backlog maintenance has been a major concern for ORVA considering Thatcher and Felsenthal are 40 years old and Columbia and Jonesville are 50 years old. Funding just hasn't supported it in the past. We're also concerned with the larger funding picture when we look critically at the Corps lakes. But the good news is that some backlog maintenance was addressed this past year at Felsenthal Lock and Dam.

Two giant names of American business are deeply ingrained in the history of Monroe, and its neighbor across the Ouachita River, West Monroe. Delta Air Lines got its lowly start in 1926 as a local crop-dusting business, an emerging concept at the time, and Coca-Cola opened its first bottling plant here. Those entities are multi-billion-dollar, multi-national businesses today. Legacies that provide unique attractions for visitors.

**Economic Development.** The Ouachita River is critically important to area economies. *The river is an interstate highway* which serves as the center for navigation, recreation, economic development, drinking water, and community identity. Its economic value is high and continues to grow! In 2017, ORVA initiated an economic study, enlisting the University of Louisiana at Monroe to determine the overall economic and environmental worth of the Project. This study, researched and prepared by Robert C. Eisenstadt, PhD and Paul S. Nelson, PhD for the North Louisiana Economic Partnership, was completed in November of that year. The study (now almost seven years old) reveals the rivers' economic value generates nearly \$5.7B in annual economic activity, with commercial use returning roughly \$1.2B in income to households in Arkansas and Louisiana. In addition, all commercial use of the river is linked to nearly 21,000 full-time jobs for Arkansas and Louisiana residents. And the economic impact continues to grow. The Project is more important than ever to the welfare and economic success of the Basin. For example, this past June the Columbia Port Commission in Caldwell Parish, Louisiana announced it will receive \$10.5M, for the Ouachita River and Louisiana Highway 165 Multimodal Connectivity and Safety Project. The project will fund land acquisition and construction activities for a Truck Parking Facility located near the inland Port of Columbia, Ouachita River, and Louisiana State Highway 165. News of this grant comes on the heels of a Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development \$15M grant for infrastructure improvement projects at the Port of Columbia. These grants are designed to support the Louisiana Green Fuels (LGF) Project, currently under construction by Louisiana-based



An interesting, yet historical document from the Tensas Basin Levee District files posted just days after Pearl Harbor. green energy supplier Strategic Biofuels. The \$2.8B LGF Project will be the first renewable diesel project in North America to achieve “negative” carbon emissions. The Association will continue to pursue and support all avenues of economic development within the basin.

### **Dredging (Continued from page 7)**

Dredging efforts above the state line have been at a standstill now for some time. The Vicksburg District Environmental staff forwarded their report to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFS) November 1, 2023. We understand that the USFS, together with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, were set to reach a decision in 60-120 days. That time period passed and with it the opportunity for dredging in the northern reaches of the Ouachita. We learned late February that the USFS wanted to conduct a “more detailed study.” We remain hopeful that our mussel issue will be resolved and dredging operations will commence above the state line by the start of the construction season in FY 2025. What was once a very promising dredging picture for all of the Project has diminished and with it hopes for developing interest for commercial movement on the Ouachita as far north as Camden.

Again, funding for dredging operations looks good for this fiscal year, as it appears the Corps will only be focused on operations on the Project in Louisiana (see page 8 above). A Spring 2024 start will be delayed due to high water, but ample funding is available and contracts are being readied for operations.

We’ve talked before about the chicken or the egg; which comes first? In this case, is it dredging or shipping? The question becomes even more perplexing when you throw in this mussel issue. We cannot afford a long, drawn-out conclusion to this issue. For certain, it will never happen unless it gets pushed to resolution.

One final word on dredging: let’s get this mussel issue fixed – and soon! We all understand how critically important dredging is to the waterway and in turn, to the local economy.

### **Repairs to the H.K. Thatcher Lock and Dam**



Funding for the Thatcher Lock and Dam appears to be elusive.

In late October 2021, lock operators at the H.K. Thatcher Lock and Dam noticed the gate was unable to hold the 77 ft pool level, prompting the Vicksburg District’s Army Corps of Engineers to immediately investigate the issue. The 200-foot-long hinged crest gate stretches across the Ouachita River and stands roughly 5 feet high. In normal conditions, it has about a 1-foot head over the top. After a thorough investigation and analysis, engineers from the Vicksburg District successfully installed a “Poiree Needle System” on November 28, 2021 to repair the leak in the seal of the hinge crest gate. This temporary repair was

A “Poiree Needle System” supported by thick steel I-beams is in place as a “long-term” temporary repair until funding for permanent repairs can be obtained, now expected to occur in FY 2026.

later fortified with steel I-beams. The Poiree Needle System continues to hold, even with the high waters resulting from the rains of early-mid April 2024.

Although high on the Mississippi Valley Division's priority list, we anticipated funding would be available in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025. We are currently looking at FY 2026, based upon a Tentative Mississippi Valley Division Lock and Dam Maintenance Schedule for that FY. Repairs were originally estimated to commence in FY 2024 at a cost of \$4M. Today, the cost of repairs are estimated to run north of \$5M, and that may be on the short side considering the ever-increasing loss of buying power. As that estimate continues to grow, it is doubtful the operation and maintenance budget will.



Fuel movements on the Ouachita continue at a record pace. This beautiful picture provided by long-time ORVA friend Clay Manly shows a recent barge movement of fuel. Movements typically travel in “Two Packs;” each 300-foot barge with a 30,000-barrel capacity.

Note the water level on the Ouachita. Recent high-water levels have had no impact on barge traffic. As noted in the Tonnage report on page 6, fuel shipments have increased substantially

over 2022 levels and should continue to increase or (at least) remain at a steady-state in the future.



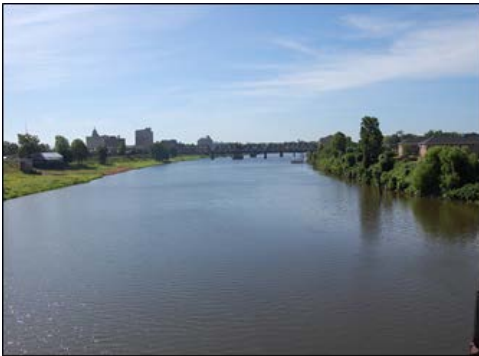
## ORVA Convention 2024

We are busy planning the 57th ORVA Annual Convention 2024 in historic West Monroe, Louisiana. We've had to make some modifications concerning timing but believe the shift in the traditional timeframe will be better suited for convention attendees. This year's event is scheduled for **September 19-20, 2024**. It plans to be an entertaining, yet important discussion of issues affecting the Ouachita River and the people of the Ouachita River Basin. Rather than having the usual - a complete series of speakers behind podiums - we will have several small panel discussions featuring, for example, navigation, the Ouachita River as an economic driver, funding, and permitting for river projects. Please be sure and calendar this important date. The convention will present attendees with the opportunity to engage in meaningful and interesting discussion on these and other key topics of interest.



Basketball player **Bill Russell** was born in West Monroe, Louisiana on February 12, 1934. The legendary center was a five-time NBA MVP and 12-time All Star selection. He led the Boston Celtics to 11 national titles from 1957 to 1969. Russell died July 31, 2022 at the age of 88.

It is true that maintenance of the Corps' locks and dams represents a substantial investment in taxpayer dollars for the Corps of Engineers. But can you imagine the negative costs if there were no locks and dams on the Ouachita? The sole purpose of the Association when founded 130 years ago, was to obtain a year-round commercial navigation system. The locks and dams are critical to that purpose and maintenance of those locks and dams is of paramount importance! Maintenance – yes, considering the locks and dams in Arkansas and Louisiana are ~ 40 and 50 years old, respectively.



We might not can imagine the costs of the absence of the locks and dams but we can visualize what it might look like. These two pictures depict the Ouachita River at Monroe, Louisiana. On the left is a fairly recent photo taken south of Monroe, Louisiana looking north. At right is an artists' depiction of what the river at Monroe would look like if it were not for the Corps' lock and dam systems on the Ouachita River.



Ouachita Parish was named for the Ouachita Indians. It was established on March 31, 1807 as one of the 19 parishes created by dividing the Territory of New Orleans. The original Ouachita Parish was subsequently divided into several other parishes including Morehouse, Union, Caldwell, Franklin, Tensas, Madison, East Carroll, and West Carroll.



Louisiana raised several regiments of federal soldiers during the American Civil War. The units consisted of two heavy artillery regiments and three light artillery batteries, three cavalry regiments (two white and one redesignated United States Colored Troops), and 32 infantry regiments. The majority of infantry regiments (28) were soldiers of African descent, redesignated from Louisiana Infantry (African Descent) and Corps d' Afrique to United States Colored Troops.

**Modification of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project to include Bank Stabilization as a feature of the Project.**

Bank stabilization is of paramount importance to the people living within the river basin. We are greatly concerned with bank caving and other erosion problems on the Ouachita and Black Rivers in multiple areas. These issues occurring all along the Ouachita and Black Rivers threaten to cause catastrophic flooding and, in turn, hinder navigation. This problem is not only confined to Louisiana, but reaches well into the upper Ouachita, especially in the Camden,



Arkansas area and north as these pictures so well illustrate.



The Corps expends tremendous energy and resources addressing bank stabilization through the PL 84-99 Project, mostly in those 63 miles which were removed (we believe in error) from the MR&T. Multiple sites in Ouachita and Caldwell Parishes in Louisiana have been repaired, several obligated, and still more submitted for this

program. Thanks to our partners in the Tensas Basin Levee District, these issues are identified, detailed, and submitted to the Vicksburg District, who work in unison to address those bank caving and erosion issues. These issues far exceed the financial capability of the levee district to maintain the project to any acceptable standard. Funding for these issues, through the PL 84-99 Project is very limited. In addition, they must be linked to a high-water event and in most every case, they are not addressed in a timely manner. And as time marches on, the erosion or bank caving issue at



the site continues to grow as well as the corresponding growth to the necessary funding needed for the repair. Modification of the project to include bank stabilization as a project feature places it under federal authority for maintenance and repair. In reality, using PL 84-99 funding for repair, though it is effective and most appreciated, is not an efficient use of taxpayer resources.



The ORVA leadership is comprised of three officers and seven directors each from the states of Arkansas and Louisiana and supported by an Executive Director.





An aerial view of the 2018 Ouachita River flooding.

ORVA is a non-profit organization representing the private sector of the economy. Your tax deductible gift would help support economic development within the Ouachita River basin.

### The Ouachita River – A Top 10 to Remember

The Ouachita River has made the Top 10! That is – the Top 10 of the most alligator-infested Rivers in the United States. The Ouachita River, as reported by *A-Z Animals*, tops the list at Number 9. Interesting, since it is estimated that there are more than 250,000 flowing rivers in the United States.



An interesting statistic, alligators once flourished in Arkansas. However, in the 1960's and 70's their numbers dropped considerably due to habitat loss, urban sprawl, and hunting pressure. Today, through preservation efforts, relocation, and limiting the alligator harvest, Arkansas again has a growing alligator population. Many have found their way to the Ouachita River. There they share the river with their Louisiana cousins. Whether you are above or below the state line, be on the lookout for an alligator next time you're on the beautiful Ouachita River. The fishing is good but you might want to be on the lookout if you're thinking about cooling off with a swim.

The recent rains of 9-10 April pushed the Ouachita River to near 37 feet at Monroe. Action stage is reported at 35.5 feet with minor flooding in low-lying areas at 40 feet. **The five highest recordings of the Ouachita River at Monroe:** 50.5 feet on May 4, 1991; 50.5 feet on May 23, 1958; 50.4 feet on April 16, 1945; 48.7 feet on May 9, 1973; and 47.8 feet on November 11, 2009.

## Groundbreaking Ceremony for West Monroe's Public Fishing Pier

On a cold and windy February 5, the City of West Monroe hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for a public fishing pier. The pier is part of the Downtown West Monroe Riverfront Marina Project. The pier is funded by a grant from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the Sport Fish Restoration Program, and private funds raised from the "Picture this Campaign."



Several state legislators and area dignitaries joined West Monroe Mayor Staci Mitchell and Madison Sheahan, the newly-appointed Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries for this event.



Groundbreaking photo (Secretary Sheahan is sixth from the left and Mayor Mitchell is fifth from the right).  
See the \$25,000 check from the "Picture this Campaign"

*- The town I write from (Monroe) is as pretty and pleasant a place as I know of in the whole South, and it is as prosperous and flourishing a place withal as can be found in the whole commonwealth of Louisiana. Situated in the garden spot of the Ouachita valley, it is a central point of business, of resort, and of general interest to the surrounding country. Citizens of wealth and cultivation make it their home, and their costly and tasteful residences, embowered amid the affluent vegetation which the rich soil and genial climate of the locality cause to flourish with tropical luxuriance, present the most charming aspect of rural ease subserving refined tastes and abundant means. The town crowns the high and at this point never overflowed banks of the beautiful Ouachita, and by water is held to be about five hundred miles from New Orleans.*

*Editor, The New Orleans Crescent (New Orleans), August 20, 1860*

Many rural and small-town residents in both Arkansas and Louisiana have faced water shortages or water outages due to the severe winter weather we experienced just a few months ago. "Boil" advisories and leaks have become all too commonplace in many areas. Many of our systems can be termed fragile at best and most all need to be repaired or replaced. Other systems need to be expanded.

We've come to realize that as some rural towns and communities lose population and government funds shrink, their drinking water systems become one failure away from crisis. In many local areas, most water systems operate in a crisis with additional systems needing to be developed. Water shortages have prevented the development or expansion of some central systems, but the most important factor inhibiting the development, expansion, repair, and replacement of central systems is a lack of funding.



- The cotton is very promising for the season, and a fair average crop is calculated on. The corn crop is estimated at from a third to a half what it should have been. The weather is exceedingly warm and rain is very much needed. The Ouachita runs unusually low this season and particularly at this time. It is little more than a creek winding through the lowest part of its broad and nearly empty bed. Boats cannot get nearer Monroe than about one hundred and sixty miles.

*Editor, The New Orleans Crescent (New Orleans), August 20, 1860*

**Lake Ouachita**, which is part of the Ouachita Project Management Office along with Lake Greeson and DeGray Lake, is nestled in the Ouachita Mountains 10 miles west of Hot Springs, AR. The project provides an abundance of recreational opportunities for citizens such as boating, fishing, camping, mountain biking, and scuba diving with over 40,000 acres of crystal clear water and 20,000 acres of public land available for use. Furthermore, the lake is surrounded by the Ouachita National Forest which itself encompasses an additional 1.8 million acres for public use.



The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) maintains over 1,100 campsites across 15 campgrounds and 20 boat ramps around Lake Ouachita. Primitive camping on the more than 200 islands located within the lake boundary is extremely popular.

In 2023, Lake Ouachita welcomed over 1.86 million visitors and received over \$970,000 in total revenue to include camping, day use, and pavilion reservation fees. In addition to the USACE-managed recreation areas, Lake Ouachita is also home to an Arkansas state park that includes a marina, cabins, campsites, and a visitor center. There are also eight major commercial concessions around the lake that manage amenities such as full-service marinas, cabins, docks, restaurants, and mobile home sites. Also, the group “*Friends of Lake Ouachita*” partners with USACE and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to maintain 44 miles of the LOViT multipurpose trail located on the south side of Lake Ouachita.

With a few hundred miles of river from Camden, AR to Jonesville, LA, the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project also allows ample recreation opportunities for visitors across 19 recreation areas strategically located along the river. These recreation areas provide amenities that range from playgrounds, volleyball courts, nature trails, picnic areas, fishing piers, comfort stations, and boat ramps for fishermen. USACE offers primitive camping opportunities at 3 campgrounds located at Finch Bayou Recreation Area, Prairion Bayou Recreation Area, and Fort Necessity Recreation Area. Hunting opportunities are also available at select project areas. The Corps of Engineers has an agreement with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to control water levels at the Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge to provide excellent duck hunting opportunities.

Aside from the recreation areas mentioned above, opportunities are provided at individual recreation areas managed by Union County, Arkansas, the Crossett Port Authority, and a joint venture between Calhoun County, Arkansas and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. Amenities at each of these three recreation areas include RV camping opportunities.

*Jason Mooney, US Army Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg District*

**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) | _____ \$ 200 Civic/Professional |
| _____ \$ 100 Small Business       | _____ \$ 200 Public Entity      |
| _____ \$ 500 Corporate            | _____ \$1,250 User Fee          |
|                                   | _____ \$2,500 Primary User      |

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

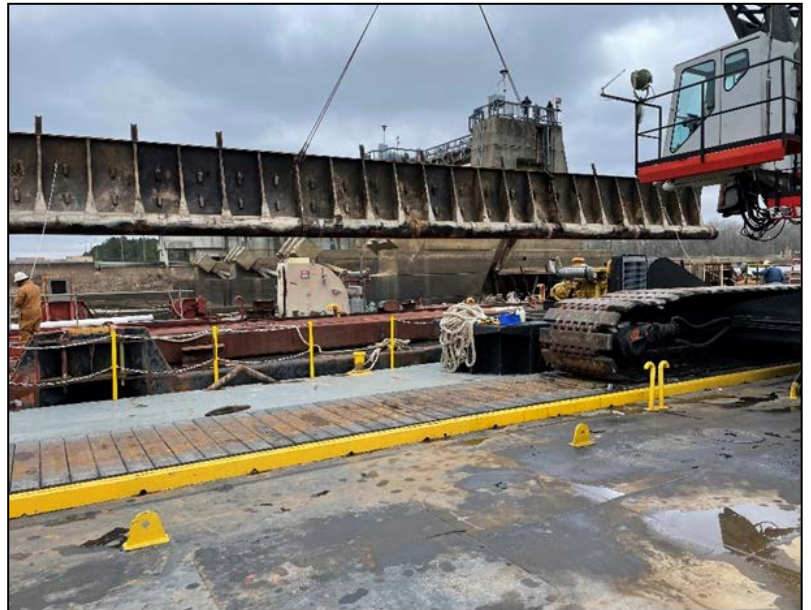
**Ouachita River Valley Association  
P.O. Box 913  
Camden, AR 71711**





**Charles Antoine Francois 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.

The Poiree Needle System was completed at Thatcher on November 28, 2021 after loss of pool. In February 2022, the system was fortified to create what the Corps determined to be a “long-term temporary” fix. There are no restrictions and the system continues to hold during high water events. We remain hopeful that funding will become available for this critical repair during FY 2026.



## **Water Resources Development Act**

ORVA’s WRDA priorities, although separate, are closely related. They remain the same. However, with the discovery of severe bank caving and erosion in the northern reaches of the Ouachita River this past fall, ORVA has reversed the order of their priority. ORVA is greatly concerned with bank caving and other erosion problems on the Ouachita and Black Rivers. These issues threaten to cause major flooding and greatly hinder navigation on the waterway. This problem is not only confined to Louisiana, but reaches well into the upper reaches of the Ouachita River, especially in the Camden, Arkansas area where we are hopeful to see dredging operations commencing no later than FY 2026.

**Priority 1.** Modification of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project to include Bank Stabilization as a feature of the Project.

**Priority 2.** Modification of the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project to include the portion of the Ouachita River Levee System (the lower 63 miles of the east bank of the Ouachita River levee system) at and below Monroe, Louisiana to Caldwell Parish, Louisiana. These two issues, although separate, are closely related.



## Tensas Basin Levee District holds Groundbreaking Ceremony for New Facility

Employees, Commissioners, Elected Officials, other dignitaries, and members of the public met Thursday, April 25 to conduct a Groundbreaking Ceremony for the new Tensas Basin Levee District (TBLD) Administrative Building and Maintenance Facility. The new facilities will be located at 400 Logtown School Road, south of Monroe, Louisiana, just off Highway 165.

Pictured left is an artists rendition of the TBLD Administrative Building. The center will boast state-of-the-art technology to aid in the management of the levee systems and the area floodfight.



and provides an overview



Mr. Drew Keahey, left, President of the TBLD welcomes guests and provides comments during the Groundbreaking Ceremony.

Pictured far left, Mr. Brandon Waggoner, Executive Director of the TBLD, welcomes attendees of the facility. The TBLD is the oldest and geographically largest of the levee districts in the state of

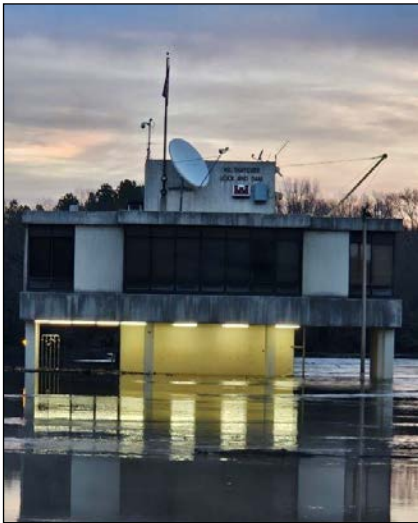
Louisiana.



Pictured with Mr. Waggoner (right) are a few of the dedicated employees of the TBLD. These men are a critical component of the TBLD success.



Navigation channels remained unencumbered and commerce remained steady throughout the winter as evidenced by the tremendous increase in fuel and rock movement northward on the Ouachita. (See page 6.) Low water conditions this past November and December lacked the impact that low water had on the Mississippi and Red Rivers. Current high-water levels have had little or no impact on shipping. As this newsletter goes to print the week of April 28, we are expecting additional rainfall and severe weather within the Ouachita River Basin.



These pictures, taken on January 31, 2024, depict the high water at H.K. Thatcher Lock and Dam. When these pictures were taken, the river stage was 88.2 feet. Normal pool level at Thatcher is 77 feet. The Poiree Needle System is more than 10 feet below the water.

**Levels of Service.** ORVA anticipates no changes to the levels of service at the Locks and Dams. There simply is not enough river traffic to warrant changes to the operating hours at the Arkansas locks and dams. We remain hopeful that with dredging all the way to Camden, we will be able to, with support of the many area economic development offices, entice shipping to the River.

### **Designation of the Ouachita River as a Marine Highway**

ORVA has initiated steps to designate the Ouachita River as Marine Highway M-165. Initial teleconferences have been held with the U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration (MARAD) and the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) to develop the necessary packet for approval. Further meetings will be held the first week of May and may include additional partners and stakeholders.

The proposal was first discussed with staff members of the offices of Congressman Bruce Westerman and Senator John Boozman. During their recent visit to Washington DC, ORVA socialized the proposed designation with its other congressional delegation. The concept met with overwhelming approval.

The designation of the Ouachita as a marine highway brings visibility for interstate commerce and federal funding. The Association believes the outcome will greatly benefit the people of the Ouachita River basin.

ORVA has initiated coordination with USACE to begin work for a “sister” channel improvement program. This program, similar to an MR&T Program, is intended to bring the remainder of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project (the lower 63 miles) under federal authority. As you may recall, ORVA has consistently lobbied for the lower 63 to be restored to the MR&T Program. We requested legislative drafting services through Congresswoman Letlow’s office for a new authority, i.e., an “MR&T-like” channel improvement program. This request would flow from Congressional offices, through the Corps headquarters staff in Washington, to the Mississippi Valley Division, then to the Vicksburg District, to begin drafting verbiage for the authority, which would then take congressional action to implement. Next comes funding authority.





Pictured at left is a copy of the front page of the Vicksburg Evening Post dated Monday, April 25, 1927.

The Mississippi River flood of 1927 began in the Delta area on April 16, 1927 due to heavy rains and a considerable northern snowmelt.

The levees (many of them virgin) broke in more than 145 locations, flooded an estimated 27,000 square miles, displaced more than 145,000 people, and killed some 250-500.

The river remained at or above flood stage for 153 days.

The Association believes we must Implement a Section 729 Study vice Section 216 to study the water resources needs of the Ouachita River Watershed in Arkansas and Louisiana. With the last river basin study conducted more than 120 years ago, much has changed in the Ouachita River basin. A real need exists 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.

This study, supported by numerous stakeholders and environmental associations, would also serve as a basis for both the Army 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. Naturally, much has changed since the old 1902 study.

A detailed study of the river would serve to address the many diverse social, environmental, and economic needs of this important watershed.

**Prairion Bayou Recreation Area**

*Warm breeze, cool water, a six-pack (or two!). The simple things. Bring your loved ones and get back to nature together this summer at Prairion Bayou Recreation Area on the Ouachita River. Put in the 'ol boat and load up your bait cause you can even catch your own dinner here! We all need a back-to-basics experience every once in a while. Get started on your adventure soon... believe us, you won't regret it!*

The description taken from the website. There are 10 RV or tent camping sites available. Campfires are allowed and toilets are on site. This sounds like the perfect weekend getaway!

See the Lakes Update on Page 16.

## Lake DeGray Field Office and Interpretive Visitor Center

Construction of a new Lake DeGray Field Office and Interpretive Visitor Center remains an ORVA concern. The Corps' lakes significantly contribute to the economy of Arkansas, and the Hot Springs community in particular, in the areas of tourism, recreation, and development. Tourism, Arkansas' second largest industry, continues to grow with sales topping \$6B, employing 120,000 people, and generating more than \$500M in tax revenue.

An older maintenance building with considerable issues, the Lake DeGray Field Office is the last remaining facility to be replaced at the Vicksburg Districts' Arkansas Lake Projects.



The location and construction of this facility has been elusive for the past several years. We are hopeful that the construction of this new facility will be strongly considered at its current location. ORVA believes a new Field Office and Interpretive Visitor Center represents a win-win for the Corps, the region, and area visitors, not to mention the safety and health of Corps employees. It is inextricably linked to the Hot Springs economy.



Picture of the H.K. Thatcher Lock and Dam taken on January 31, 2024. The river stage at Thatcher on this date measured 88.2 feet.

The Tensas Basin Levee District (TBLD) was created by an Act of the Louisiana Legislature on July 3, 1884. It is the oldest and geographically largest levee district in the state. The district includes all or part of eight parishes: Caldwell, Catahoula, Franklin, LaSalle, Morehouse, Ouachita, Richland, and West Carroll. The Governing Board consists of eleven commissioners, one in each parish, an additional at-large member, and two additional commissioners from Ouachita Parish. The Board of Commissioners monitor agency operations for fiscal accountability and serves as liaisons between the levee district and their respective communities. Their business experience is invaluable to the levee district.



The Chennault Aviation and Military Museum is located in Monroe, Louisiana near the Monroe Regional Airport. The museum preserves and highlights local area aviation with exhibits from WW I to the wars on Terrorism.



The museum is named in honor of United States Army Air Force General Claire Lee Chennault, a Louisiana native.

Ms. Nell Chennault, the General's granddaughter is the CEO of the museum. Chennault Park, located in Monroe, is named in his honor. General Chennault is also commemorated by a statue in the Republic of China's capital, Taipei. It is also interesting to note the foreign badge above the right breast pocket on General Chennault's jacket. It appears to be Chinese Aviation Wings.

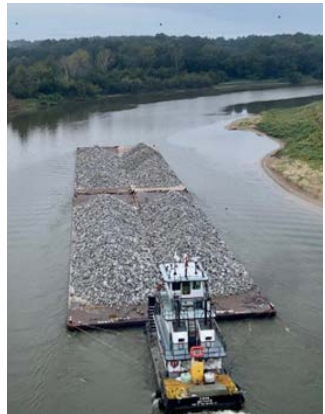
**Tonnage for First Quarter, Calendar Year 2024**

Tonnage for the first quarter of calendar year 2024 looks good! We appear to be on track for another great year. Anticipating 170 KTONS of corn and soybeans at harvest and fuel and rock shipments on the path as anticipated, we should see ~ 1.7 million KTONS of movement on the Ouachita-Black for 2024.

1st Qtr, Calendar Year 2024				
Commodity	Upbound (KTONS)	Downbound (KTONS)	Total (KTONS)	YTD
Gasoline Incl Aviation (incl Jet)	102.4000		102.400	
Residual Fuel Oil	99.200		99.200	
Limestone, Sand, and Gravel	171.600		171.600	
Machinery/Bulkheads (Not Electric)	1.850	5.000	6.850	
Other	.047	.050	.097	
<b>Total</b>	<b>375.097</b>	<b>5.050</b>	<b>380.147</b>	

Again, the numbers presented in the graph represents "Upbound" and "Downbound" tonnage (reflected in thousands of metric tons) on the Ouachita at the Jonesville Lock.

With tonnage above the "magic" 1 million-mark, funding should remain favorable well into FY 2026. Tonnage below the 1 million mark equals a low-use waterway and funding is negatively reflected. So much of what happens on the Ouachita-Black is related. The movement of commodities and materiel – shipping – is directly related to dredging. Dredging and shipping means economic development in the basin and tonnage affects funding for dredging and maintenance.



Rock moving north on the Ouachita during low water.



The movement of rock on the Ouachita continues at a substantial pace and should continue at record levels for the next 36-42 months. The northbound movement of rock is the second major contributing factor to the increase in tonnage on the River.

The rock can be attributed to gravel surfacing of the Ouachita River Levee System south of Monroe, Louisiana and projects for bank stabilization by the Tensas Basin Levee District. The Vicksburg District supports many of those projects through the PL 84-99 Project. The projects, however, must be tied to a high water event and funding becoming the essential ingredient.

ORVA is hopeful for an increase in the shipment of grains – soybeans, wheat, and corn – especially with this fall's harvest. The movement of agricultural commodities have shown a moderate increase in recent years.

A shipment of rock headed north towards Monroe as part of a Project initiated by the Tensas Basin Levee District. This beautiful photo courtesy of Clay Manly.

**Invite a friend to become an ORVA member**

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



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Camden AR 71711