

Dewatering and Closure of Jonesville Lock and Dam

Industry is feeling the weight of the potential for the upcoming “dewatering” and closure of the Jonesville Lock and Dam.

Although forecasted for some time, conditions for the “dewatering” process have not been right. That is until now. Water levels on the Project at Jonesville (Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project) have reached that point where U.S. Army Corps of Engineers maintenance personnel and contractors can begin the process.

Originally forecasted much earlier, the date was first planned a month prior to the latest revision: a start date of July 6. However, water levels were not consistent with that start date and the process was moved to July 30.

What was originally planned was a 2–3-week closure for the upper deck, followed by a 1–2-week window of operations, and a 2–3-week closure for the lower deck with some daylight closures. That has changed with the shift to the July 30 date.

The current schedule forecasts a three-week closure beginning July 30 with preparatory work beginning now with some intermittent daylight-only closures. This closure will only affect the upper miter gate bay; only one closure vice two closures.

ORVA conducted a TEAMS meeting Wednesday morning, July 15, to discuss the dewatering and closure with industry. Although anticipated, the majority of industry partners were concerned with the timing of the closure. Because the timing adversely affects agriculture during the upcoming harvest (which has already begun), ORVA supports, and is working with the Army Corps of Engineers to shift this process to the right.

The closure creates second and third order effects, which adversely affect agriculture in our region. As you might imagine, substantial grain is moved through the Jonesville Lock. Already hindered by lower commodity prices and rising production costs, our farmers cannot afford another setback.

Grain is not the only product on the river. Substantial amounts of fuel and rock move through that lock. Fuel, to the tune of 60,000 barrels, as much as two-three times a week moves north through the lock. That said, the Ouachita River helps fuel north Louisiana. The same can be said for limestone, sand, gravel, and fertilizer.

The timing is never good for a dewatering process. However, the last time this maintenance action was performed was closer to 20 years ago...well beyond its due date. ORVA has lobbied consistently for maintenance and the funding for backlog maintenance, i.e., that maintenance that should have been done on the Project. Backlog maintenance is well into the hundreds of millions of dollars...and continues to grow with each passing year.