COLUMBIA LOCK EMERGENCY CLOSURE AND REPAIR—GREAT NEWS! The Columbia Lock emergency repairs are nearing completion and the lock is anticipated to be opened for commercial navigation traffic the first or second week of May. A Dam Safety Emergency declaration for Columbia Lock and Dam was issued on July 3, 2018, due to seepage and piping of foundation material downstream of the lock. Navigation was suspended on July 3. A repair contract was awarded on August 16 to Massman Construction. Hayward Baker, a sub-contractor, drilled holes upstream of the lock gate, along the lock wall, and below the lock to fill voids. Holes were developed and tested for relief wells to reduce the pressure. Other fixes consisted of driving sheet piles to cut off the flow and filling voids under the lock caused by seepage. A void of approximately 450 cubic yards was discovered during testing that led to a modification of the original scope of work for the void. Another impact to the emergency closure was the need to lower the Columbia pool to a target elevation of 49 feet and the Jonesville Lock and Dam pool to a target elevation of 36 feet to relieve pressure on the Columbia Lock. Industries, municipalities, and recreational water users of the Ouachita River adjusted and continue to monitor the emergency water level conditions. The ORVA has worked closely with the Corps of Engineers as they have diligently investigated the emergency conditions, awarded the repair contract, and are inspecting construction. The Corps continues to hold bi-weekly progress meetings and calls as needed to keep all interested parties informed. The Corps’ and ORVA’s goal is to get the Columbia Lock repair completed and lock opened as soon as possible.
2017/2018 Dredging – The dredging completed in late 2017 and 2018 opened the Ouachita-Black Navigation Project from the juncture of the Black River with the Red River to the Head of Navigation in Camden, Arkansas. The additional $2,000,000 that was added per remaining items (Funding Pots) for Operation and Maintenance of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project, Red River to Camden, AR, to the FY 17 President’s Budget of $8,445,000 along with available funding provided the most dredging and clearing and snagging operations on the waterway that has occurred in several years. Also, the FY 18 President’s Budget of $10,548,000 for the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project included the $2.0 million additional dredging amount that was not included in the FY 17 budget. Although the project needs to be funded at $11.1 million annually for efficient operation and maintenance of all four locks 24/7/365 and required dredging, with the current upper two locks operating only 10 hours daily 5 days a week, the FY 18 project budget was adequate. This annual maintenance dredging and snagging is vital to the current industries that utilize the waterway to transport their products. Also, this dredging supports local industrial development agencies as they recruit water-based industry to the area. This type of commitment on a continuous annual basis is what the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project needs for increase commercial navigation to occur. With the return of commercial traffic on the upper portion of the waterway, the future utilization of the navigation project is moving in a positive direction. ORVA believes with improvements in the economy and the continued need for efficient transportation the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project will be a vital component of the region’s future economic growth and will continue to improve the quality of life in the Ouachita Valley.

2019 Dredging – The FY 19 President’s Budget of only $7,979,000 was a disappointment. The FY 19 Budget amount allows for only minor dredging of the waterway and with the emergency closure of Columbia Lock, dredging above Columbia Lock could not be accomplished. ORVA has requested channel surveys of the waterway be conducted prior to opening the Columbia Lock to identify any navigation restrictions and determine the dredging requirements. A plan should be developed based on these requirements and dredging expedited once the Columbia Lock is opened so further delay in use of the waterway does not occur. ORVA will be working with our Congressional Delegation and the Corps of Engineers to acquire necessary dredging funds. These funds will be more vital than ever with re-opening the Columbia Lock for commercial traffic.

2020 Dredging – The FY 20 President’s Budget of $7,339,000 will only allow minimal dredging and operation and maintenance of the locks and dams. FY 20 will be the second year in a row that appropriate dredging funds to maintain the waterway have not been included in the President’s Budget. The Corps of Engineers has identified additional capability in the amount of $13,015,000 to be used for inspection surveys for the Felsenthal Lock and Dam ($60,000), repair Felsenthal tainter gates ($1,500,000), P&S ($440,000) backlog maintenance of lock and dam ($700,000), dredging ($3,405,000), recreation activities ($150,000), periodic inspections ($345,000), data gathering ($200,000), and all other operation for navigation activities ($6,014,000) and other various activities ($201,000).

LEVEL OF SERVICE – The Vicksburg District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Annual Assessment for the Inland Marine Transportation (IMTS) for the J. Bennett Johnston and Ouachita/Black River Waterways was completed and a decision provided on March 19, 2018, in a Memorandum for the Record from Colonel Michael C. Derosier. Col. Derosier indicated that staffing and hours of operation are at a sustainable level and does not anticipate major changes in the near future. ORVA will continue to work with the Vicksburg District office to ensure, at the minimum, the current levels of service remain the same on the Ouachita-Black Waterway with 24 hours per day operation at the lower two
locks, Jonesville and Columbia, and 10 hours per day, 5 days per week with no weekend service at the upper two locks, Felsenthal and Thatcher. The Corps began operating the locks in this manner on November 15, 2015, after being operated at two shifts per day (19-20 hours daily) since July 2012. They began operating the upper two locks in AR (Felsenthal and H. K. Thatcher) 5 days per week (10 hours daily) on Monday-Friday with no weekend service on the same date. This action resulted from the Corps review of project usage based on criteria contained in the IMTS study which provides guidelines for the level of service to be provided by navigation projects.

The Ouachita River Valley Association has pressed for restoration of full-time service at all four locks since service was reduced to two shifts daily nearly 9 years ago. Special emphasis has been placed on keeping the Louisiana Locks on 24/7/365 operation as this is where the majority of the commercial waterborne traffic is moving on the system. Also, now that commercial traffic is returning to the upper portion of the waterway, it is essential to press for restoration of full service at the upper two locks.

**2018 COMMERCIAL TONNAGE** - Commercial tonnage on the system in 2018 will be lower than in past years due to the emergency closure of the Columbia Lock. When the Columbia Lock is opened in 2019, it is anticipated tonnage on the waterway will increase above levels in past years. With the upturn in the economy, increasing oil prices, maintaining the current level of service, 2017/2018 maintenance dredging, shipments for levee repairs, and the return of commercial traffic on the upper portion of the waterway, it is expected commercial tonnage will return to the 1 million-ton range.

**2016 WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT (WRDA)** – The 2016 WRDA contained the ORVA sponsored 2014 WRRDA Section 7001 language for a study to determine the feasibility of modifying the navigation project to include bank stabilization as a project feature. ORVA continues to pursue options to fund the completion of the study.

**2017 Report to Congress per Section 7001 WRRDA of 2014** – The ORVA-sponsored request to modify the authorization for the Ouachita-Black Navigation Project to include dredging the 14,000 feet on the lower end of Little River was included in the Annual Report to Congress on Future Water Resources Development, included in the Main Report, and a study was authorized. The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development has provided the Corps a Letter of Intent to sign a Feasibility Cost-Share Agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to initiate a study to modify the authorized project to include Little River as part of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project. A request is being processed through the FY 21 Budget process to fund this study. ORVA looks forward to getting this study underway.

The water supply proposal to modify the navigation project to include water supply as a project feature was not included in the 2016 WRDA and not included in the Main Report to Congress per the 2014 WRRDA Section 7001. Water Supply is not a primary mission of the Corps of Engineers, therefore, was not included in the 2014 WRRDA Section 7001 Report to Congress. ORVA will continue to push to have water supply as a project feature. Water Supply from the Ouachita River continues to grow in its importance in not only sustaining the current, but is essential in the future economic development and role in improving the quality of life for the residents within the Ouachita River Basin and region.
PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY ORVA
2019 FUNDING STATUS

The FY 20 President's Budget included $7,339,000 for Operations and Maintenance of the Ouachita-Black Navigation Project, Red River to Camden, AR. This amount will not be sufficient for annual dredging requirements. ORVA has requested the Corps of Engineers to conduct channel surveys prior to opening the Columbia Lock to identify any navigation restrictions and determine the dredging requirements. Once these requirements and funding are determined, ORVA will work with our Congressional Delegation and the Corps of Engineers and request the needed funds to accomplish the dredging requirements. Underfunding of the navigation project has resulted in a maintenance backlog of over $20.3 million. The most critical deficiencies include very limited dredging funds and the lack of a lock closure system at the H. K. Thatcher L&D. Additional capability maintenance funds are requested to address the maintenance dredging and funds are needed in the amount of $6.0 million for construction of stop log slots at the H.K. Thatcher Lock & Dam. Recreational facilities have also been allowed to deteriorate and have not been updated with age and increased usage. The lower reaches of the Ouachita River below Monroe were at one time included in the Mississippi River and Tributaries Project to provide bank stabilization and levee construction. Portions of the Ouachita River Levees in the Monroe, LA, area and north are now part of the MR&T Project as a result of WRDA 07. Action is now underway to include language in an authorizing document to have the entire Red-Ouachita Basin Levees, LA, Project area made a component of the MR&T Project.

The President's Budget did not contain any funding for the Ouachita River Levees, LA, in FY 17, FY 18, or FY 19. However, the Vicksburg District had previously expressed an FY 16/17 additional capability of $1,900,000. The FY 20 President’s Budget does contain $141,000. This $141,000 would be used primarily to gravel surface of levees below Monroe, LA. The FY 19 President's Budget contained approximately $22,320,000 for operation and maintenance for Lake Ouachita, DeGray Lake, and Lake Greenson. The FY 19 Allocation for operation and maintenance of the three lakes is $23,576,000. The FY 20 President’s Budget contains $20,736,000 for operation and maintenance for the three lakes while the Corps’ expressed that total capability of $46,287.600 for these three lakes is needed to address critical backlog items. The priority "additional capability" for each lake includes various construction items that will increase the quality of the recreation experience for visitors.

Lack of bank protection has resulted in numerous bank failures that are now a danger to public infrastructure including levees, some of which have been 'set-back' more than once. The Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project did not include provisions for bank stabilization, and there is no ongoing authority for this work. The 2016 WRDA contains a provision for a study to determine the feasibility of modifying the Navigation Project to include bank stabilization as project features. Also, 2016 WRDA authorized a study to determine the feasibility of amending the Navigation Project by adding navigation from Mile 41.5 on the Black River, at the mouth of Little River, upstream 14,000 feet as a project feature. As presented earlier, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development has provided the Corps a Letter of Intent to sign a Feasibility Cost-Share Agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to initiate a study to modify the authorized project to include Little River as part of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project. The Corps has requested funds for the study through the FY 21 Budget process.
Funds in the amount of $1.3 million were used in late FY 18 and early FY 19 for maintenance dredging was completed at the Lake Providence Harbor and continued monitoring is ongoing per Mississippi River stage conditions. The FY 20 President’s Budget contains only $30,000 for the Lake Providence Harbor and no funds for the Madison Parish Port. Annual dredging funds of $1.3 million will be needed for the Lake Providence Harbor. Although no funds were included for the Madison Parish Port, funds are anticipated to be made available for dredging at the port subject to Mississippi River stages. The FY 19/20 funding status for each of these projects is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
FY 19/20 FUNDING STATUS
ORVA SUPPORTED PROJECTS
OUACHITA RIVER BASIN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>FY 19 PRESIDENT'S BUDGET</th>
<th>FY 19 TOTAL ALLOCATION</th>
<th>FY 20 PRESIDENT'S BUDGET</th>
<th>FY 20 TOTAL CAPABILITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ouachita-Black Navigation Project, Red River to Camden, AR</td>
<td>$7,979,000</td>
<td>$8,229,000</td>
<td>$7,339,000</td>
<td>$16,949,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Dredging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$3,405,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Stoplog Slots</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Red-Ouachita Basin Levees, LA</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$141,000</td>
<td>$333,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ouachita River Levees, LA</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$4,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Arkansas Lakes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Lake Ouachita, AR</td>
<td>$9,131,000</td>
<td>$9,416,000</td>
<td>$7,858,000</td>
<td>$20,258,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. DeGray Lake, AR</td>
<td>$7,438,000</td>
<td>$8,054,000</td>
<td>$7,138,000</td>
<td>$15,538,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Lake Greeson, AR</td>
<td>$5,751,000</td>
<td>$6,106,000</td>
<td>$5,732,000</td>
<td>$10,491,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Bank Stabilization, Ouachita-Black Rivers, Mile 0 to 460 Remmel Dam (not authorized)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ouachita-Black Navigation Project, Addition of navigation from Mile 41.5 on the Black River LA, at the mouth of Little River, upstream 14,000 feet (not authorized/study authorized)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Lake Providence Harbor, LA</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$1,315,000</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>$1,830,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Madison Parish Port, LA</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$207,000</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$507,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the most important functions performed by ORVA is to support and promote Ouachita River Basin projects with the Arkansas and Louisiana Congressional members and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers during visits conducted semi-annually. Our most recent visit was during the March 4-5, 2019, timeframe in which we stressed the need to fund/authorize these projects. The following photos show our visits with Senator John Boozman of Arkansas, Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, and Congressman Ralph Abraham of Louisiana.

L to R: Jason Trichell, Fifth Louisiana Levee District; John Stringer, Tensas Basin Levee District; Reynold Minsky, Fifth Louisiana Levee District; Senator Boozman; Bill Burrough, City of Hot Springs, and Rayford Wilbanks, Executive Director, ORVA
L to R: Jason Trichell, Fifth Louisiana Levee District; Reynold Minsky, Fifth Louisiana Levee District; Senator Bill Cassidy; John Stringer, Tensas Basin Levee District, and Rayford Wilbanks, Executive Director, ORVA
L to R: Jason Trichell, Fifth Louisiana Levee District; Reynold Minsky, Fifth Louisiana Levee District; Congressman Ralph Abraham; John Stringer, Tensas Basin Levee District; Rayford Wilbanks, Executive Director, ORVA, and Bill Burrough, City of Hot Springs
General Marine Services (GMS) conducted a christening ceremony for the Motor Vessel Syble Fay on February 15, 2019. GMS was founded by Gene Moore in January 2016 and based in Baton Rouge, LA. The Motor Vessel Syble Fay is the fourth vessel to go along with 11 red-flag tank barges. The company specializes in transportation of refined black oil and petrochemical products and agricultural fertilizers throughout the inland waterways.

When asked about the vessel name, Gene Moore said, “Named after sweetest woman on earth. My mother.” “She was the heart and soul of our family,” Moore said of his mother, who died in 2012. Gene’s mother would be so proud to see her son, who grew up on a Mississippi Delta farm next to the Mississippi River, progress to founder of GMS. Gene began his career at Mississippi Marine Corporation shipyard in Greenville, MS in 1988 after receiving an Agricultural Degree at Mississippi State University. After working for other towing companies for 23 years, Gene founded GMS in January 2016 with one leased towboat and tow-leased barges.

The Syble Fay was designed and built by Intracoastal Iron Works of Bourg, LA. The Syble Fay is a 2,000 hp. Towboat measuring 78 feet by 34 feet with open wheels and a depth of 10 feet. The vessel has two Cummins QSK38 main engines. Houma Machine & Marine, LLC supplied the Syble Fay with
four-blade Sound propellers, which measure 78 by 66 inches. The ship’s service power comes from a pair of Cummins QSB 7 generators. The MV Syble Fay has tankage for 28,000 gallons of fuel, 600 gallons of lube oil, 100 gallons of hydraulic oil, and 13,000 gallons of water.

The layout and design aboard the Syble Fay are what sets the vessel apart from others at work on the inland waterways. There are five staterooms, including the standalone captain’s quarters located on the vessel’s “Texas Deck,” along with three and a half bathrooms. The vessel has a large galley and eating area, with adjacent crew lounge, and exercise room with television. The wheelhouse is totally open, with a compact and innovative control panel. Eye level aboard the Syble Fay is just over 33 feet. The vessel has a “fleet deck” which improves visibility and is safer for walking in all-weather conditions.

Gene Moore, said, “Besides faith and determination, he stressed the importance of relationships.” “It’s relationships with customers, friends, and vendors that has helped us get where we are today.” Moore said, “The same is true within the company, calling the company’s employees our most valuable assets.” Moore said, “Some believe this is a commodities-based business, but I still believe it’s all about relationships.” The christening of the Motor Vessel Syble Fay was not only to celebrate the adding a new vessel to the GMS fleet but to celebrate the continued growth of GMS.

Angela Moore with the honor of christening the Motor Vessel Syble Fay as Gene Moore observes.
The 2019 ORVA Annual Convention will be held September 5-6, 2019, in Hot Springs, AR. The Embassy Suites Hotel will host the Convention with the Thursday afternoon activities and evening banquet conducted at the Hot Springs Convention Center next door. Friday’s activities will be conducted at the Corps of Engineers Project Office at beautiful Lake Ouachita.

The Thursday night banquet speaker and speakers for Friday’s event at Lake Ouachita will consist of Congressional representatives and key state representatives of Arkansas and the Corps of Engineers. This will be a very entertaining and informative event in regards to water resources and water-related projects within the Ouachita River Basin. Save these dates and plan to attend this event to associate, network, and socialize with others who want to insure the economy, environment, and quality of life for residents of the Ouachita River Valley are improving on a continuous basis.

**2019 ORVA ANNUAL RAFFLE**

The ORVA Annual Raffle tickets will be on the market soon, so do not miss the opportunity to purchase a chance to win! The ORVA Board of Directors have elected to provide three chances to win one of three prizes again this year. Your purchase of a raffle ticket or tickets help ORVA support the development, operation, and maintenance of water resources projects within the Ouachita River Basin in Louisiana and Arkansas. ORVA funds raised through ORVA Annual Memberships, Annual Convention Sponsors, and the Annual Raffle are utilized in efforts to improve economic development and a better quality of life for those within the Ouachita River Basin.

Last year the Annual Raffle consisted of three chances to win one of three excellent prizes. Last fall Mr. Jeff Choate, Pine Bluff Sand & Gravel Company, won the Stoeger M3500 Shot Gun. Now, what are the odds of two wins in a row? Mr. Choate won the single raffle drawing in 2017 that consisted of a Stoeger M3500 Shoot Gun and MOJO Dove and Waterfowl Packages. ORVA does expect Jeff to purchase a lot of ORVA raffle tickets this year. If Jeff wins this year, I am carrying him to Vegas!

Mr. Gilbert Vowell, an employee of Pine Bluff Sand & Gravel Company, was the winner of the Mountain Harbor Resort & Spa 2-night weekend – Cottage or Condominium, and Day’s use of Party Barge Vacation on Lake Ouachita. Mr. Vowell utilized his prize to celebrate his wedding anniversary on Valentine’s Day.

Mrs. Priscilla Mack, El Dorado, Arkansas, won the MOJO Waterfowl Package and although I understand she does not hunt, did provide it as a great Christmas gift to a family member.
The following statement was submitted for the record for the Public Meeting of the Mississippi River Commission on April 10, 2019, at Rosedale, MS, on behalf of the Ouachita River Valley Association (ORVA) regarding development of water and land resources in the Ouachita River Basin.

General Kaiser and Members of the MRC:

I am Rayford Wilbanks, Executive Director of the Ouachita River Valley Association (ORVA), and I have the privilege of presenting this statement on behalf of our Association.

The Ouachita River Valley Association has been in business for 126 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.

General Kaiser and Colonel Derosier, our Association appreciates your continued support and that of your staff. We have and intend to maintain close contact with the Corps staff and present a coordinated effort to further develop water and land resources in the Ouachita River Basin.

Our comments today focus primarily on the Fiscal Year 2019 and Fiscal Year 2020 President’s Budget for completed projects within the Ouachita River Basin, particularly the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project, AR & LA, and on efforts to obtain authorization for project additions.

1. OUACHITA-BLACK RIVERS NAVIGATION PROJECT, RED RIVER TO CAMDEN, AR. ORVA appreciates the diligent efforts to secure emergency funding and drive to repair the Columbia Lock. Companies and commercial shippers eagerly anticipate the opening of the Columbia Lock. Our good news is commercial navigational traffic is moving on the upper portion (Arkansas portion) of the project. TETRA Technologies continues to ship out of Crossett Harbor. Also, the Arkansas Waterway Commission is engaged and working to garner more use of the commercial waterway. The FY 19 President’s Budget of $7,979,000 allowed for only minor dredging of the waterway and with the emergency closure of Columbia Lock dredging above Columbia Lock could not be accomplished. ORVA has requested channel surveys of the waterway be conducted prior to opening the Columbia Lock to identify navigation restrictions and determine the dredging requirements. A plan should be developed based on these requirements and dredging expedited once the Columbia Lock is opened so further delay in use of the waterway does not occur. We are disappointed that the FY 20 President’s Budget dropped to $7,339,000. ORVA will keep pressing for an annual budget of $11+ million in order to fully operate and are working with our congressional delegation to request additional appropriations to return to an acceptable funding level. We stressed this point with USACE/Congressional members during our March 2019 Washington, D.C., visit and will again during our October visits. ORVA’s goal is to maintain the channel to authorized dimensions up to Camden, AR, the Head of Navigation.
We thank the Vicksburg District for its efforts to get a contract underway to repair the Columbia Lock seepage. As you know this has stopped all commercial traffic above the Columbia Lock. Just when dredging was completed to open the channel all the way to Camden, AR, the Head of Navigation, and expectations of increased commercial traffic on the waterway, the Columbia Lock had to be closed. Our Association requests that this traffic blockage be considered when the Inland Marine Transportation Study is applied on the Ouachita River at the end of the year. The Ouachita River Navigation Project should not be penalized due to this required lock closure.

We are also concerned about the $20+ million in backlog maintenance associated with the Navigation Project. In addition to the lack of dredging funds, we remain concerned that presently there are no reasonable means to dewater the lock at H. K. Thatcher Lock and Dam if the miter gates are accidently damaged or for some reason become inoperable. We remain in contact with our Congressional members in hopes that the $6,000,000 needed for construction of stop log slots at H. K. Thatcher Lock and Dam can be funded since this could become a safety issue.

On November 15, 2015, the Vicksburg District began operating the Jonesville and Columbia Locks in Louisiana on a 24/7/365 basis after being operated less than 24 hours daily since July 2012. The upper two locks, Felsenthal and Thatcher in AR, began operating 5-10 hours per day, Monday-Friday, with no weekend service, at the same time.

Tonnage on the Ouachita-Black Rivers system fell below 1 million tons in 2015 for the first time since 2013-tonnage was 945,080, down 13 percent from 1,075,520 in 2014. Tonnage in 2016 was 884,000 tons and approximately 800,000 tons in 2017. We had anticipated that with the lower two locks operating on a 24/7/365 basis and traffic beginning to move on the upper portion of the project again, tonnage would move back in the 1 million-ton range. With the Columbia Lock Closure, it will take longer to see increased tonnage on the waterway. There has been a dramatic reduction in the number of shippers on the system in the last several years—from 17 in 2010 to 5 in 2018. Members of ORVA who are in the commercial shipping business have warned of this since implementation of the Inland Marine Transportation System Study (IMTS) in July 2012. Commercial shippers will shy away from navigation systems that aren’t operated on a dependable 24/7/365 basis. There is a certain stigma associated with waterways if they are branded as something less than desirable for efficient navigation. There are other causes for decreased commercial traffic, such as depressed oil prices, insufficient dredging, depressed economic conditions, etc.; however, there is no question that the chief reason for decline is implementation of IMTS. We have briefed the Commander and senior staff of the Vicksburg District, HQUSACE, and our Congressional delegation in this regard.

Our position from the very beginning was that the project should be operated as authorized at a full level of service and specifically, the lower two locks in Louisiana should have never been operated at less than a full level of service. With tonnage running less than one million tons annually, it is going to be difficult to compete for scarce Federal funds. We have experienced this with no dredging funds included in the 2016 and 2017 President’s Budget and inconsistent funding unlike in the previous years when tonnage exceeded one million. Given the decline in funding and continued project needs, we took steps to have an economic impact study done to quantify the overall economic/environmental
value of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project. This study was conducted and completed by the University of Louisiana Monroe in December 2017 and funded by the North Louisiana Economic Partnership. The study revealed commercial use of the River generates nearly $5.7 billion annually and is linked to nearly 21,000 full-time jobs in Louisiana and Arkansas. Further, commercial activities have returned $1.2 billion to household incomes throughout the region. The study results demonstrate and highlight the value and overall importance of the waterway to not only the region but the Nation. ORVA anticipates substantial economic growth, particularly in the Louisiana portion of the navigation project, in the future now that a full level of service has been restored, however, it is going to take time to recover.

ORVA submitted two proposals under Section 7001 of the 2014 WRRDA for project modifications of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project, AR & LA, in March 2015 as follows:

1. Add bank stabilization and water supply as project features which would authorize the Corps to construct bank stabilization measures and operate the project in accordance with water supply needs.
2. Add the lower 14,000 feet of Little River as a project feature which would authorize the Corps the authority to dredge this area.

The bank stabilization proposal was included in WRDA 2016 as a study to determine the feasibility of modifying the Navigation Project to include bank stabilization as a project purpose. We have begun working with the Corps staff in regards to the appropriate path forward for the bank stabilization proposal. The water supply feature was not included in WRDA 2016. We will continue to seek water supply as a project feature. The Little River Proposal was included in the 2016 Section 7001 main report to Congress for consideration and included in WRDA 2016. The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development has provided the Corps a Letter of Intent to sign a Feasibility Cost Share Agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to initiate a study to modify the authorized project to include Little River as part of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project. The Corps Vicksburg District has indicated a request to fund the study will be include in the FY 21 Budget process. ORVA looks forward to getting this study underway.

2. OUACHITA-BLACK RIVERS NAVIGATION PROJECT, RED RIVER TO CAMDEN, AR, BANK STABILIZATION ADDITION. There is a critical need to authorize bank stabilization as an integral component of the Navigation Project. Bank stabilization was not authorized as a project purpose when the project was authorized for construction in 1950. Major bank erosion/caving occurs along the Ouachita and Black Rivers hindering navigation and threatening catastrophic flooding. The recent floods of late 2009, 2010, 2016, and 2018 caused major damage to banks and levees. ORVA has developed language to be placed in the next WRDA or appropriate document which would authorize bank stabilization as a project feature of the Navigation Project and thus a Federal responsibility for repair of eroded sites.

3. OUACHITA-BLACK RIVERS NAVIGATION PROJECT, RED RIVER TO CAMDEN, AR, LITTLE RIVER ADDITION. A major problem area has developed in the lower 14,000 feet of Little River where it flows into the Black River. Sediment from the Ouachita-Black Rivers during high-river stages blocks
navigation on this segment of Little River, thus preventing fuel from being transported by barge to the major distribution center at Archie, LA. Approximately 70,000,000 gallons of fuel is barged annually to the distribution center. Little River was closed to river transportation for about 5 months during 2010 resulting in major disruption and increased fuel prices for consumers in a 15 parish and county-wide distribution area in central Louisiana and western Mississippi. The owner of the fuel terminal incurred dredging and other associated costs of approximately $850,000 to have the channel constructed back to navigable status. In July 2015, the owner had to acquire dredge services at a cost of ~$300,000 and again in July 2018 at a cost of ~$160,000 to remove sediment from the lower portion of Little River. The possibility of blockage each year is very likely.

ORVA recommends that action be taken that would authorize the Corps of Engineers to dredge the lower 14,000 feet of Little River. As indicated above, ORVA looks forward to the study to modify the authorized project to include Little River as part of the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project. The fuel terminal at Archie, LA, provides about 25 percent of the total tonnage that moves on the Ouachita System. Any substantial downtime at this facility as occurred in 2018 will most assuredly result in the tonnage on the entire system falling below 1 million tons and will make competing for Federal funds more difficult.

4. RED-OUACHITA BASIN LEVEES, AR AND LA. Critical erosion problems occurring along the Ouachita and Black Rivers threaten to cause catastrophic flooding and hindrance to navigation. The amount of erosion of banks, and subsequently levees, far exceed the capability of local interests to maintain the Project to acceptable standards. ORVA and the Tensas Basin Levee District have been working for years to have the Ouachita River Levees Project restored as part of the Mississippi River and Tributaries Project (MR&T), thus making maintenance of the system a Federal responsibility. The WRDA of 2007 included language restoring a portion of the Ouachita River Levees (approximately 43 miles of the upper east bank, 1.9 miles of floodwall in Monroe, and 7.2 miles of levee on the west bank) as part of the MR&T Project. However, it did not reinstate the lower 63 miles of the east bank from Monroe, LA, south which is where the majority of the bank caving problems occur. Language has been developed for the next WRDA to amend WRDA 2007 to include all of the Ouachita River Levees Project as a component of the MR&T Project.

ORVA is encouraged that the FY 20 President’s Budget included $141,000 for the Red-Ouachita Basin Levees, LA, for gravel surfacing of the levees. It is extremely disappointing that the Ouachita River Levees, LA, Project did not receive funding in the President’s FY 19 or FY 20 Budget. ORVA strongly supports the construction capability of $4,500,000 expressed by the Vicksburg District for the Ouachita River Levees, LA, in FY 20.

5. OUACHITA RIVER BASIN CORPS OF ENGINEERS LAKES (LAKES OUACHITA, DE GRAY, AND GREESON). ORVA strongly supports the proper operation and maintenance of these three lakes in the Hot Springs, AR, area of the Basin. The FY 19 President’s Budget for these three lakes was $22.3 million. The Vicksburg District has expressed an additional capability of about $6.5 million to address backlog maintenance items. ORVA requested that an additional $1-$4 million per lake be added to the FY 19 budget in order to provide increased levels in service activities such as cleaning, mowing, ranger patrols, campsite reservations, user fee collections, and general facility upgrades. It is very
disappointing the FY 20 President’s Budget is only $20.7 million an approximate $2.9 million less than what was allocated for operation and maintenance of the three lakes in FY 19.

Campground upgrades represent one of the best infrastructure investments to quickly stimulate the economy through a Federal “jobs bill” type program. Here is what Mr. Bill Barnes, local tourism industry leader, recently had to say:

“Arkansas’ second largest industry is now-SOLIDLY- tourism with gross receipts last year of over $5.7 Billion (that is a B!) in sales; employing almost 120,000 people; and generating almost $500 million in taxes. Tourism is the only industry in the state that has been stable and growing over the last ten years and is one of the largest employers of youth in entry level positions.

Arkansas’ tourism industry is only as good as its products. The three Vicksburg District Corps of Engineers lakes in the Ouachita Basin are a huge component of Arkansas’ tourism product. I am delighted to report that the five counties surrounding Ouachita, DeGray and Greeson-Clark, Hot Springs, Pike, Garland, and Montgomery, have shown substantial tourism tax revenue increases from 2014 to 2016. Because this tax is collected on attractions such as lodging, marina, campgrounds, and slips, we believe it’s an accurate indicator of the business.

The most unfortunate situation is the condition of the Corps of Engineers campgrounds, many of which have had virtually no improvements or renovations in 20+ years. The Camping/RV public is expanding at a terrific rate with camper trailer sales increasing 38 percent from 2014 to 2016. We have virtually no up-to-date campgrounds to offer them. This would be one of the most important investments the Corps could make in the lakes’ tourism product.

Tourism in Arkansas and the Corps of Engineers investment on Lakes Ouachita, DeGray, and Greeson generate one of the largest returns on investment, which equates to additional tax dollars of any public money investment. At the rate tourism is growing, it is anticipated that it will become the #1 industry at some point. BUT, we must have a quality product to continue that growth.”

ORVA will press for certain capability amounts expressed by the Vicksburg District are allocated next fiscal year.

6. LAKE PROVIDENCE HARBOR, LA. We thank the Corps for the 2019 dredging accomplished at the Lake Providence Harbor. The primary annual need at Lake Providence Harbor is for $1,300,000 annually for dredging the channel. The FY 20 President’s Budget of $30,000 will not address the annual dredging requirement. ORVA does support the expressed FY 20 Total Capability of $1,830,000. ORVA has assisted the Lake Providence Port Commission in preparing language for the next WRDA, or appropriate authorizing document, to correct the harbor channel sediment problem caused by sediment laden flows into the harbor channel by Stack Island Chute. The solution consists of a diversion plan whereby a new outlet channel is dug from the Stack Island Chute to the Mississippi River. A closure would be placed in the Chute to prevent sediment during high Mississippi River conditions from entering the harbor. It is anticipated this plan would dramatically reduce annual
dredging maintenance. The Port Commission has been working with the State of Louisiana and the project is now included in the State’s Port Priority Program with construction funding expected in July 2020.

7. MADISON PARISH PORT, LA. The FY 20 President’s Budget did not include any funding for the Madison Parish Port. ORVA does support the expressed FY 20 Total Capability of $507,000 that could be used for dredging in FY 20.

In summary, ORVA would appreciate your assistance and support in obtaining additional Operation and Maintenance funds for dredging, in gaining authorization for water supply, placing the remainder of the Ouachita River Levees as part of the MR&T Project, considering campground upgrades at the three Ouachita River Basin Corps lakes, and completing the study of the lower 14,000 feet of Little River to authorize it as a feature of the Navigation Project.

On behalf of the Ouachita River Valley Association, we thank the Mississippi River Commission for all you do for our country.

ORVA MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

The Ouachita River Valley Association is always working on 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. Our goal is to retain all existing members and enlist new members. Additional members are needed first to help “Tell the Story” to Federal and other officials why it is of critical importance to continue the development of water and land resources in the Ouachita River Basin and second, there is “strength in numbers.”

Listed below are reasons for joining ORVA:

1. Be part of an organization that has been in existence for 126 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 Director.

2. 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 Valley.

3. 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.
4. 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, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Commanders, U.S. Coast Guard Commanders, and experts in the fields of navigation, flood control, water supply, recreation and tourism, and fish and wildlife.

5. 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. Board members meet quarterly.

6. 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.

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

Remember this is the Association that served as the voice of the private sector that was utilized by U.S. Senator Allen J. Ellender and U.S. Representative Otto Passman of Louisiana and U.S. Senator John McClellan and U.S. Representative Oren Harris, both of Arkansas and others in getting the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project constructed. This project today serves as one of the primary generators of economic and environmental activity in the Ouachita River Basin.

You are encouraged to consider joining this important Association and help continue its proud legacy.

A membership application follows.
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/members 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:

Individuals:

_____ $ 50 per year (minimum)  _____ $ 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
Invite a friend to become a member of ORVA!!

“A River Basin of Opportunity, A Century Plus of Commitment”

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