

BAYOU METO



Water Management District

Public Meeting – Caruthersville, Tennessee Mississippi River Commission Low-Water Inspection Trip August 15, 2016 Gene Sullivan, Executive Director

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The nation is still confronting serious water issues and the Bayou Meto Basin Project in eastern Arkansas is the adopted solution by federal, State and local interests to resolve many water and environmental management issues in the Bayou Meto Basin. Many of our water resource issues are related to intensive agricultural irrigation that has steadily depleted groundwater aquifers. While many areas of the nation do not have ready solutions, Arkansas is blessed with significant surface water resources in its rivers and streams that can provide an alternative to the depletion of our groundwater. Without this solution, estimates are that food and fiber production in the basin will likely decline by 80% from current yields. Protecting our food and water supply must become a priority at all levels of government and by private property interests.

The Bayou Meto Project will move water from the Arkansas River to almost 267,000 acres of prime farmland. To date, the major diversion pump has been installed and the first canals are under construction. The Bayou Meto Project is a comprehensive approach to problems we face and can resolve most of the basin's agricultural water supply problems, as well as reversing environmental damage caused by poor water management practices and inadequate flood control.

Many aspects of the project will reduce the carbon footprint of activities in the Basin.

- The project will reduce about half the current energy used for irrigation, an estimated savings of \$10,000,000 annually.
- The project will also reduce groundwater withdrawals by 70% of current pumpage rates. Existing irrigation wells are a combination of 60% electric and 40% diesel motors. Almost half of these can be shut off when the project is complete.
- The Marion Berry Pump Station on the Arkansas River is supplied by power from the City North Little Rock's Electric Department. This public power

system has a hydroelectric generator at the Murray Lock and Dam which produces about twenty percent of its power. The City is adding a natural gas generator to provide peak load power.

The Bayou Meto Project includes significant conservation elements:

- Better irrigation practices, such as construction of reservoirs to capture excess streams flows and tailwater recovery ponds for irrigation purposes, which will reduce groundwater withdrawals.
- Provide water to dry stream beds to improve aquatic ecosystems.
- Remove flooding conditions that have devastated our bottomland hardwood forests.
- Restore 10,000 acres of native wetland and prairie grasslands.
- Most important, protect the Sparta Aquifer, an aquifer below the Alluvial Aquifer which contains very pure water that should be reserved as a clean supply of drinking water.

Important Dates of Federal Actions:

- 1982 - Congress directs the Corps of Engineers to study the feasibility of developing water conservation and supply projects in eastern Arkansas. The outcome was a 1990 resolution identifying the Bayou Meto Basin as a potential project area.
- 1996 - Congress directed the Corps of Engineers to produce a General Reevaluation Report with three purposes: Flood Control Management, Waterfowl Management and Water Supply. The GRR was completed in 2006 with Secretary Woodley approving the project in 2007.
- 2009 - Congress appropriates \$2,650,000 for Planning, Engineering, and Design.
- 2010 - Congress appropriates \$37,000,000 for the construction of the two main pump stations (Marion Berry and the Little Bayou Meto Pump Stations).
- 2011 - \$354,000 federal appropriation to continue construction of the Marion Berry Pump Station features.
- 2012 - \$4,400,000 federal appropriation to continue construction.
- 2014 - Marion Berry Pump Station is complete and \$10,600,000 federal appropriation to continue construction.
- 2015 - \$19,500,000 federal appropriation to continue construction (completes phases 1 & 2 of canal construction).
- 2016 - \$3,300,000 authorized for survey and design of flood control and waterfowl drainage features and contract administration.

Important State and Local Actions:

- 1991 - Formation of the Regional Water District.
- For the past twelve years an Improvement Project Area has collected assessed property taxes to support the project raising approximately \$350,000 per year.
- The State of Arkansas has contributed \$41,000,000 in grants and \$14,000,000 in loans for the project.

- The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission has committed \$8,000,000 for the project.
- The Corps of Engineers has approved expenditure of non-federal funds as prior authorized of federal funding or accelerated funds.

The Bayou Meto Project is a comprehensive and multi-purpose approach to solving our many environmental and water resource problems. Continued financing is essential to obtain the projected benefits ample water provides for food and fiber security of the nation and a decent environment for future generations. The Bayou Meto Water Management District is exploring all funding options to continue development of this project.

The project sponsors are very concerned that the project funding for FY2016 (\$3.3 M) was \$16.2M less than 2015 even though the mini-pot for 2016 (\$40M) was \$10M more than 2015. We were also very surprised that the funding specifically excluded awarding any new contracts for constructing the groundwater protection/water supply element of the project. We only need \$15M in Federal Funds to complete the construction needed to deliver the first water into the Basin and start generating some income. We have already expended more than \$140M on the project and have been assessing landowners for eleven years.

We want to thank the Commission and the Corps for their continued support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gene Sullivan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gene Sullivan, P.E.
Executive Director

GS/cb