

Dear Mr. Mueller:

Thank you for your presentation before the Mississippi River Commission during the public meeting in Helena, Arkansas, on April 3, 2001. In your statement you expressed concerns for the unmet needs in the St. Francis Basin. You also discussed the activities involved in the White River Basin Comprehensive Study and groundwater depletion problems and alternative solutions to agricultural irrigation in Arkansas.

We concur that erosion, headcutting, and sediment deposition continue to be problems in the St. Francis Basin. As you know, the Memphis District is developing a sediment model for the St. Francis River from Lake Wappapello to the mouth. This model should be completed in September 2001. Supplemental data, including additional topographic survey information in critical areas, will be collected this summer. With the model and associated field data, the Memphis District will have better tools for projecting the locations and magnitude of existing and future problems. The District staff will continue to work with local, state, and other Federal interests on a strategy for addressing these complex problems.

Your participation in the White River Basin Comprehensive Study is appreciated, and your comments will be fully utilized while formulating the plan of study. The study will examine the problems and opportunities of this important resource. Though not under the jurisdiction of the Commission, we recognize the need for this study. Funds are included in the President's budget for Fiscal Year 2002 to continue this effort. A project sponsor must be identified to contribute the non-Federal cost share of the study.

The Grand Prairie Area Demonstration project is designed to protect the groundwater resources in the area while maintaining agricultural production that is the basis of the regional economy. The demonstration project will provide the water necessary to protect both the Sparta and Mississippi Valley alluvial aquifers. The project is justified based on economic benefits to the nation alone and also provides aquifer protection and waterfowl habitat benefits. The increased irrigation efficiency features of the project will increase efficiency to 70 percent over the project area. Experts with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) disagree that this is a modest efficiency rate. NRCS studies indicate that while 80 percent may be obtainable on a single farm, it is not attainable over the entire Grand Prairie project area. Raising the efficiency by 10 percent without taking water from the White River was analyzed, and it was found that increasing the efficiency would provide water to only an additional 9,100 acres of irrigated cropland.

The Commission recognizes the need for activities to protect groundwater in the delta region of central and eastern Arkansas. However, as you are probably aware, the President's budget request for Fiscal Year 2002 does not include any funding to continue design and construction of the Grand Prairie Area Demonstration project. Given the large backlog of funding needed to complete construction projects already underway, the budget focuses on completing these ongoing projects.

Thank you again for your participation in our public meeting. The Commission appreciates receiving your comments and will be pleased to hear from you at our future hearings.

Sincerely,

Edwin J. Arnold, Jr.  
Brigadier General, U.S. Army  
President Designee, Mississippi  
River Commission

