



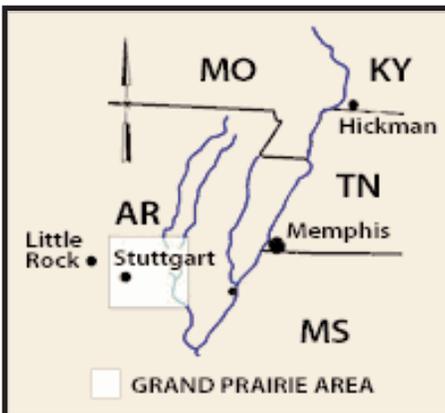
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G R A N D P R A I R I E A R E A I R R I G A T I O N D E M O N S T R A T I O N P R O J E C T

STOP THE CORPS FROM CREEPING INTO NEW MISSION AREAS: DO NOT FUND THE GRAND PRAIRIE AREA IRRIGATION DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is poised to build a massive pump and distribution system that could draw up to 100 billion gallons of water a year from Arkansas' White River. This ill-conceived Grand Prairie Area Demonstration Project — one of several Corps projects proposed to tap the White River — would permanently alter the river's complex hydrology. Reduced river flows would threaten internationally acclaimed wetlands, and degrade water quality throughout the river basin.

The Grand Prairie Area Demonstration Project is a \$319-million project designed to provide irrigation water to eastern Arkansas' Grand Prairie region, where rice farming is threatening to deplete two aquifers. The project would be able to pump as much as 1.06 billion gallons of water per day from the White River, and distribute it to fewer than 1,000 farms through a 650-mile distribution system.

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S FY2004 BUDGET RECOMMENDS NO FUNDING FOR THE GRAND PRAIRIE PROJECT. CONGRESS SHOULD CUT ALL FUNDING FOR THE GRAND PRAIRIE.

FISH AND WILDLIFE AT RISK

By permanently altering the river's flow, the Grand Prairie project will put the area's abundant fish and wildlife populations at risk. In particular, it will threaten:

- Largest concentration of wintering mallard ducks in North America,
- A significant portion of Eastern Arkansas' multi-million dollar recreation and tourism industry,
- The ecological integrity of two flagship National Wildlife Refuges — the White River and the Cache River National Wildlife Refuges, which are world-recognized Ramsar Convention wetland sites and are home to the most vibrant population of native black bears in Arkansas,
- A diverse freshwater fishery with more than 100 species of fish and 45 species of mussels,
- Numerous species of migratory songbirds, waterfowl and other birds,
- The pink mucket mussel and other endangered and threatened species,
- The country's decades-long investment in the White River National Wildlife Refuge, which could be severely damaged by such a massive diversion of water from the river.

"If this mammoth sucking machine is placed in the river, the integrity of the entire Lower White River ecosystem will be threatened and the river we all cherish could disappear forever."

— Terry Horton, Executive Director, Arkansas Wildlife Federation

\$200,000 PER FARM SUBSIDY

U.S. taxpayers will pay for 65% of the \$319-million Grand Prairie project. This \$208-million federal share amounts to a subsidy of more than \$208,000 per farm and a per-acre subsidy that is more than the average ***purchase price*** for agricultural land in the region. This would be on top of the \$1 million federal taxpayers paid out to more than 140 Arkansas rice producers between 1996-2001 alone. The Army Corps of Engineers promotes the Grand Prairie irrigation project as a solution to the problem of declining aquifers in eastern Arkansas. Once the project is in place, they expect farmers to switch from groundwater to surface water for irrigation. But nothing about the project guarantees that outcome. There will still be no limits on groundwater withdrawals. If groundwater is one penny cheaper, or just more convenient for farmers to use, they can still do so.

WANING SUPPORT OF LOCAL FARMERS

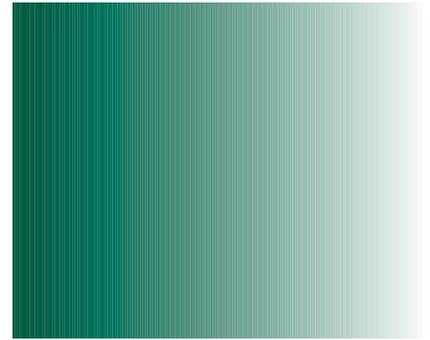
Even among farmers in the project area, support for the Grand Prairie irrigation project has been slim. In addition to concerns about whether the distribution system will even work, many local farmers are reluctant to be taxed for the \$111-million local share of the project cost. Others worry that *all* Arkansas taxpayers will wind up footing the bill, because the state has agreed to cover the local share if for some reason the farmers are unable to pay. The White River Irrigation District, which will administer the project locally, was able to scratch up support from only about 50 percent of the landowners in the project area — the supposed beneficiaries. To garner even that meager support, the Corps of Engineers has manipulated the project boundaries, shrinking it to about two-thirds its original size. To satisfy farmers worried about distribution canals being dug across their land, the Corps has also altered the project design, replacing some of the distribution system's open canals with more underground pipes. These changes increase the project cost, casting doubt on the Corps' claims of a positive cost/benefit ratio for the project.

MISSION CREEP

With this project, the Corps hopes to create a new area of business for itself. The Grand Prairie is called a "demonstration" project because the Corps wants to demonstrate its ability to construct massive irrigation systems on par with its traditional flood-control and navigation projects. The Grand Prairie project would be the Corps' first irrigation project, the first of four irrigation projects in the White River basin; and the first of some 13 Corps irrigation projects being planned across eastern Arkansas. The estimated cost for just five of these projects exceeds \$1 billion.

"It's clear this irrigation project is the wrong solution to the water problem on the Grand Prairie because there are so many local farmers and other citizens in the area opposing it."

— Tommy Drew, local rice farmer



THERE IS A BETTER WAY!

The Grand Prairie Area Demonstration Project is not necessary. A coalition of White River communities, farmers, local businesses, sportsmen and conservationists has proposed much less costly and damaging approaches to meet the water needs of rice farmers and other interests in eastern Arkansas. Alternatives include investing in on-farm water conservation, paying farmers to retire marginal croplands, and helping farmers convert land to less water-intensive uses, like dry-land farming and wildlife-based recreation. Used together, these strategies not only protect the White River today, they also work for the long term, because they will bring water use in line with what the region's water sources can deliver.