



News Release

**Natural Resources
Conservation Service**

Room 3416 Federal Building
700 West Capitol Ave.
Little Rock, AR 72201
Web: <http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov>

Release No.: 050721-01

Contact: Reginald Jackson, State Public Affairs Specialist
(501) 301-3133; (w) 501-352-7761(c)
reginald.jackson@usda.gov

Dennis Carman, White River Irrigation District
dcarmanpllc@comcast.net
(501) 416-0859; (870) 255-2202

USDA NRCS and the White River Irrigation District hosted groundbreaking for Grand Prairie Irrigation Project on May 7

LITTLE ROCK, AR, May 07, 2021 – The USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the White River Irrigation District hosted a groundbreaking ceremony on May 7 west of DeValls Bluff for the first phase of construction of the Grand Prairie Irrigation Project. The groundbreaking marked the beginning of construction on the first series of canals which will deliver water from the White River to irrigate roughly 37,800 acres of cropland upon completion.

“We want to thank the White River Irrigation District for their leadership and persistence on this project over the years,” said Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan during the ceremony. “This has been a very challenging project. If not for the leadership, ingenuity, and persistence of the irrigation district and their staff, with strong support from the State of Arkansas, Governor Asa Hutchinson, the Arkansas Congressional Delegation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Arkansas Department of Agriculture and NRCS, this project would never have progressed to this point.

Over the past several months, Arkansas NRCS has received \$48 million in federal funds to be used with local funding available to construct several segments of the project and pipelines so the irrigation district can begin delivering water,” Sullivan added. “This initial section will construct the first two miles of canals. Overall, this project will greatly reduce the rate of groundwater withdrawal and allow farmers to continue to be productive, growing more rice than any other state, as well as other crops, all while reducing their pumping costs.”

Once completed, the Grand Prairie Irrigation Project, in portions of Arkansas, Lonoke, Monroe and Prairie counties, will provide continued irrigated production on 245,400 acres of cropland. Agricultural water management will increase irrigation efficiencies and provide supplemental water for agricultural crops utilizing the White River as the surface water source. Other benefits include energy savings and increased yields due to the increased managed use of surface water. NRCS serves as a technical adviser

Helping People Help the Land

USDA is an Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer

to project sponsors because of its engineering and environmental expertise and ability to deliver science-based technology and knowledge about the watershed's natural resources and ecosystem.

-more-

Funding for the project is being provided through the PL83-566 Watershed Program. The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program helps units of federal, state, local and tribal of government (project sponsors) protect and restore watersheds up to 250,000 acres.

“Today is a huge milestone towards delivering affordable water to our farmers across the White River Irrigation District,” said Dan Hooks, White River Irrigation District president. “The progress we have made over the course of the last few years has put us on the right path towards our ultimate goal of improved efficient and sustainable irrigation practices here on the Grand Prairie.

The vision for the project that Mr. Jake Hartz, Mr. Bill Moorehead, and other leaders for the District had over 50 years ago are finally coming to fruition and we couldn't be more pleased with where we are heading. Carrying out that vision wouldn't be possible without the continued hard work of all of our state and federal partners, but to name a few, Governor Hutchinson, Arkansas Agriculture Secretary Wes Ward, U.S. Senator John Boozman, U.S. Congressman Rick Crawford, NRCS, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Arkansas Agriculture Department. We know we have a lot more work to do, but today is a big step for the farmers of the Grand Prairie,” Hooks added.

“Agriculture is the state's largest industry, contributing more than \$21 billion to our economy annually,” said Arkansas Agriculture Secretary Ward. “This phase of canal construction is another testament to the progress being made towards supporting Arkansas agriculture while also preserving our natural resources.”

Since 1954, the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program has helped communities address critical needs on flood control, water management, watershed protection and development. This strong federal, state and local partnership has resulted in the construction of more than 2,000 watershed projects that help communities across the nation. These watershed projects reflect a federal investment of about \$6.2 billion and deliver an estimated \$2.2 billion in average annual benefits nationwide.

In Arkansas, there have been 35 completed watershed projects. Included in these 35 projects are 209 small and medium size flood control dams and hundreds of miles of flood control drainage ditches. Built by NRCS, in partnership with local watershed districts, these earthen dams and ditches provide an average annual benefit of over \$51 million from the reduction in flooding.

In 2020, NRCS announced that it was investing in one existing and three new multi-year projects (including the Grand Prairie Irrigation Project) in Arkansas that will build vital infrastructure and conserve natural resources. The other projects are Bayou Meto Irrigation Project, the West Fork of the White River Watershed Project and the Departee Creek Watershed Project.

To learn more about NRCS's Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program log on <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/landscape/wfpo/>. To learn more about conservation assistance opportunities, landowners should contact their local USDA service center or for more information on NRCS, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

-more-



Pictured are (left to right)

Colonel Zack Miller, District Engineer for Programs & Project Management, UASCE-Memphis; Dennis Carman, White River Irrigation District; Dan Hooks, White River Irrigation District President, Mike Sullivan, USDA NRCS Arkansas State Conservationist; Donny Davidson, Jr., Deputy District Engineer for Programs & Project Management, UASCE-Memphis; Wes Ward, Arkansas Department of Agriculture Secretary. (NRCS photo by Reginald Jackson)