RECORD OF DECISION
BAYOU METO BASIN, ARKANSAS,

I have reviewed the recommendations of the General Reevaluation Report and Environmental Impact Statement (GRR/EIS) for the Bayou Meto Basin project, dated November 2006 and revised March 2007, which describes a project designed to address shortfalls in agricultural water supply, provide increased opportunities for waterfowl management, and provide flood damage reduction to areas impacted by frequent flooding, as revised by the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works' (ASA(CW)) September 24, 2007 Memorandum for the Director of Civil Works, which completed the project authorization pursuant to Section 363(a) of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996. Based on this review, and considering the views of other agencies and the public, I find the revised recommended plan to be technically sound, economically justified, in compliance with applicable environmental statutes, and in the public interest. Thus, I approve the Bayou Meto Basin project for construction.

The revised recommended plan consists of the following major components and features:

- The agricultural water supply component includes: conservation – achieved by increasing irrigation efficiencies approximately 10 percent over the project area; using groundwater at the safe yield of the aquifer; constructing additional on-farm storage reservoirs; and importing water from the Arkansas River through a 1,750 cubic feet per second (cfs) pump station and distributing the water through a system of canals, pipelines, and existing streams and ditches to individual farms.
- The waterfowl management component includes: restoration of 10,000 acres of herbaceous wetland/prairie complex (HWC); restoration of 2,643 acres of riparian hardwood buffers along streams; and creation of 240 acres of moist soil habitat. In addition, a 1,000-cfs pump station and other features facilitate improved water management on bottomland hardwoods within the 32,000-acre Bayou Meto Wildlife Management Area. Other features, such as drop-pipe structures at the mouths of tributary streams and ditches and in-stream weirs help ensure protection of aquatic habitats by reducing erosion/sedimentation caused by overbank drainage. The HWC feature will be constructed with a wetland to buffer ratio of 20 percent wetland/80 percent buffer as generally described in the GRR/EIS to optimize benefits to the king rail.
- The flood damage reduction component consists of channel excavation and enlargement in selected ditches in the southern portion of the project area and construction of a 5-mile long channel that conveys water around the southwestern corner of the Bayou Meto Wildlife Management Area. The 1,000-cfs pump discussed as part of the waterfowl management component is necessary to obtain flood damage reduction benefits as part of this component.

The revised recommended plan does not include construction of the 23,000-acre bottomland hardwood restoration feature described in the GRR/EIS, but it addresses shortfalls in

agricultural water supply, increases opportunities for waterfowl management, and provides flood damage reduction in the Bayou Meto basin.

Alternatives that were considered included no action, and various alternatives to supply water from the Arkansas River to be used for agriculture in the Bayou Meto Basin. In addition, other alternatives were considered that would provide opportunities for waterfowl management and reduce flooding in portions of the project area. These alternatives are fully described and evaluated in the GRR/EIS. Of the alternatives considered, the recommended plan provided the combination of flood damage reduction, agricultural water supply, and waterfowl management measures that best met the needs and opportunity of the project area.

All practicable means of avoiding or minimizing adverse environmental effects were considered during plan formulation and are incorporated into the revised recommended plan. The revisions to the recommended plan do not cause additional significant adverse impacts to the human environment. The only adverse impacts and subsequent mitigation in the recommended plan were associated with the agricultural water supply and flood control components, and those features are unchanged. Direct construction impacts would result in the loss of 1,695 acres of bottomland hardwoods and 135 acres of farmed wetlands. The revised recommended plan could also induce negative hydrologic effects on an additional 1,497 acres of bottomland hardwoods and an additional 400 acres of farmed wetlands. Mitigation for unavoidable adverse environmental effects consists of restoration of 4,093 acres of prior-converted farmland to bottomland hardwoods. A project monitoring program will be developed in coordination with an inter-agency team to evaluate the success of project mitigation, waterfowl management features and to determine habitat responses to the operation of the Bayou Meto Wildlife Management Area features.

A Programmatic Agreement (PA) among the Corps, the local sponsors, the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Office, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation, and consulting Tribes regarding cultural resources is currently being coordinated with the consulting parties for signature. The PA establishes the process for addressing all cultural and archeological resources in the project area.

The Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) issued a conditional water quality certification to the Corps of Engineers for this project on February 28, 2007. Condition 1 of the Water Quality Certification stated that mineral standards for the project's receiving streams would need to be changed by the State of Arkansas prior to the proposed transfer of water from the Arkansas River. Final approval of the change in mineral standards by the State and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is expected by the end of 2007 or by early 2008. The introduction of slightly elevated levels of chlorides and sulfates into project area streams will have no measurable adverse impact on terrestrial or aquatic life. Under no circumstances will construction start on the revised recommended plan until the proposed

change in mineral standards has been approved, and the project can be operated in compliance with all state water quality standards.

The recommended plan as presented in the GRR/EIS is the environmentally preferable plan. The revised recommended plan approved on September 24, 2007, is a plan that reflects additional policy considerations and still incorporates all practicable means of avoiding or minimizing adverse environmental effects.

Technical and economic criteria used in the formulation of alternative plans were those specified in the Water Resource Council's Principles and Guidelines. All applicable laws, Executive Orders, regulations and local government plans were considered in the evaluation of the alternatives. Based on review of these evaluations, I find that the overall benefits gained by the construction of the revised recommended plan far outweigh any adverse effects. The revised project has been coordinated with the Bayou Meto inter-agency team through telephonic conversations, e-mails, and a meeting in Lonoke, Arkansas, on October 11, 2007, and the team supports the remaining waterfowl management features. This Record of Decision (ROD) completes the National Environmental Policy Act process. The ROD will be sent to all interested parties and placed on the project web site for public access.

13 Nov 2007
Date

Don T. Riley
Major General, U.S. Army
Director of Civil Works