

# Shortage affects waterfowl hunting

By CHARLES SEARCY  
Staff Writer

Arkansas' White River Basin always has been a critical stop for nearly half of North America's waterfowl that migrate along the Mississippi Flyway.



*SPECIAL TO THE TENNESSEAN*  
*The Grand Prairie Area project in Arkansas aims to pull water from the White River, flood rice fields and hopefully maintain or increase duck populations.*

It's an area waterfowl hunters from around the country, especially Tennessee, turn to during the winter. It's no doubt the duck capital of the world, as a couple of towns in the area boast.

But, according to local hunters around the Grand Prairie Area (Stuttgart included), there is a black cloud on the horizon because in the heart of the drainage, water supplies are declining.

This 1,000 miles or so of the north-south flyway annually satisfy migrating waterfowls' three major needs for survival — food, water and sanctuary.

The Grand Prairie is a critical groundwater area as defined by Arkansas state law, the first such area ever identified as having serious problems with shallow and deep aquifers (underground layers of rocks, sand, etc., that contain water) within the state.

Most of the irrigation water used for rice farming and waterfowl hunting continues to be pumped from the ground. And as shallow wells run out of groundwater, larger and unrestricted deeper wells are being punched into the region's deep aquifer.

Is the problem truly serious?

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers believes it is, and so do many others in the region.

The Corps said studies have been conducted on the problem for several years. First recognized as a problem in the 1940s, more recent studies have confirmed a critical groundwater problem in the Grand Prairie region. The region has been declared a critical groundwater depletion area.

The project, if completed, would make more food available from rice and soybean fields and would maintain, if not increase, the number of waterfowl using the region.

"We're pleased with the progress of the project, but at the same time we are concerned funding for the project was not included in the President's budget," said Tommy Hillman, chairman of Riceland Foods, Inc., and an avid conservationist and waterfowl hunter. "It makes it harder for us to go forward, but we have a very supportive congressional delegation. So we still have hopes."

The goal of the project is to establish a system to provide excess river water for irrigation and stabilize the Grand Prairie's aquifers at a reasonable cost.

The project's plans include diverting water from the White River into the Grand Prairie Basin to help maintain a healthy water supply on the surface and beneath. The Corps says the .5% of the water diverted from the river will be no problem.

The White River Irrigation District will be purchasing lands, easements and rights-of-way where required. The district will own the pumping station site as well as the land on which eight major water-control structures will be built.

"I think the White River Irrigation District knows this is a viable project that has been thoroughly researched, that's why they have signed off on this project," Hillman said. "We can still maintain the ecological balance. We've done environmental impact statements. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Game and Fish Department of Arkansas have both joined in supporting the project."

[TOP](#) | [HOME](#) | [LOCAL NEWS](#)  
[SPORTS](#) | [BUSINESS NEWS](#) | [OPINION PAGE](#)  
[WEATHER](#) | [ENTERTAINMENT](#) | [PHOTO GALLERY](#) | [CELEBRITIES](#)  
[IN-DEPTH REPORTS](#) | [CLASSIFIEDS](#) | [EMPLOYMENT](#)  
[CARS.COM](#) | [NEWHOME NETWORK.COM](#) | [APARTMENTS.COM](#)

© Copyright 2001 The Tennessean  
A Gannett Co. Inc. newspaper

Use of this site signifies that you agree to our [terms of service](#).  
Associated Press content is Copyrighted by [The Associated Press](#).

