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## **The Lower White River**

### ***Minimal impact from Grand Prairie Area Demonstration Project withdrawal***

**MEMPHIS, Tenn., Wednesday, May 2, 2001** — A comprehensive environmental plan developed by the state of Arkansas that first meets the needs of Arkansas' White River for water quality, fish and wildlife, and navigation dictates specific minimum river levels for each month. Flow in the river must be above the needs for fish and wildlife, navigation, and water quality for water to be pumped from the river.

The flow requirements established for navigation, fish, and wildlife always exceed water quality in determining withdrawal cutoff points. Subsequent studies by biologists and hydrologists have determined that withdrawals for the Grand Prairie irrigation project from the White River based on these predetermined parameters will have no measurable effect on the ecosystem including the fisheries and the wetlands along the White River.

The projected impact of withdrawals during the normal Arkansas waterfowl season – November, December and January – would not be measurable when the river is at flood stage and less than one-tenth of one foot or about 1.2 inches during low flows prior to pump shut off. The Grand Prairie withdrawals would have no effect on flood stages or durations. With on-farm reservoirs filled during the early-spring months, summer demand for rice irrigation would lower the level of the White River nine-tenths of a foot or less (June, July, August and September).

Potential impacts from the Grand Prairie Area Demonstration Project's (GPADP) water withdrawal will only occur downstream from the DeValls Bluff pumping station on the White River.

Biologists have determined that the impact of water withdrawals on the habitats of fish, mussels and invertebrates is insignificant, as is the projected impact of water level changes on oxbow lakes connected to the White River. Because of the tailwater recovery associated with GPADP's system of on-farm reservoirs, agricultural runoff will decrease and overall, water quality is expected to improve within the region.

Because the White River's flow is controlled by large man-made reservoirs located in the upper reaches of the White River Basin, more stable flow conditions are expected. In fact, during the summer months the river's flow is much higher than natural or pre-dam flows. Studies indicate that the Grand Prairie project will actually slightly change the flow patterns to a more natural condition during the growing season.

Today, the Grand Prairie region is suffering from three consecutive years of drought. Its economic base has declined because of high energy costs and low commodity prices around the world. Shallow groundwater beneath the region has been depleted and its deeper reserves of drinking water are being threatened.

The White River represents the economic lifeblood of the Grand Prairie region, which is flowing by. This waterway is a transportation outlet to the world marketplace, as well as an environmental resource that must be used wisely.

Years of scientific studies have determined that the GPADP will not significantly alter the White River in any way. However, if utilization of this waterway is delayed, the region could deplete its useable groundwater resources by 2015.