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Here we go!

Dirt flies at Bayou Meto groundbreaking ceremony

By Jim Pogue

Chief, Memphis District Public Affairs Officer

"It's been a long time coming."

That's how Bayou Meto Water Management District (BMWMD) President Gary Canada opened the groundbreaking ceremony for the Bayou Meto Basin Project at 10:30 a.m. on Oct. 22. Representatives from the diverse coalition of partners who made the project possible gathered in a field near Scott, Ark., just east of Little Rock, to celebrate the start of construction on an effort that began 60 years ago.

The Bayou Meto Basin project is designed to control flooding, protect waterfowl habitat, protect the underground irrigation aquifer and help to irrigate about 300,000 acres of Arkansas farmland in Lonoke, Jefferson, Prairie, Arkansas and Pulaski counties.



Cheryl Ramsey photo

Bayou Meto Water Management District (BMWMD) President Gary Canada opens the groundbreaking ceremony.

According to BMWMD Executive Director Gene Sullivan the project was first authorized in the Flood Control Act of 1950. Appropriation challenges and other problems delayed



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BMWMD Executive Director Gene Sullivan explains how the new pumps will help irrigate approximately 300,000 acres of valuable cropland.

organization since 1990. He explained that Pumping Station #1 (to be built near the groundbreaking site), along with the Little Bayou Meto Pump Station to be built near Reydell, Ark., at the southern end of the region, will help irrigate approximately 300,000 acres of valuable cropland. Pumping station #1 will remove water for irrigation from the Arkansas River while the Little Bayou Meto Pump Station will remove excess water and return it to the river.

"To give you an idea of the capacity of the pumps, it would take them about a minute to fill 40 residential swimming pools," Sullivan explained.

Sullivan went on to thank the members of the Arkansas Congressional delegation for their support and assistance, particularly Sen. Mark Pryor and Rep. Marion Berry (both in attendance at the ceremony), and Sen. Blanche Lincoln who was unable to attend. He also applauded the efforts of several Federal and Arkansas state agencies who all worked together, including the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission, the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Mississippi River Commission member Sam Angel, from Lake Village, Ark., attended the ceremony and spoke briefly.

"Water, in the next 15 to 20 years, will be the most valuable resource," he said. "This project will be the envy of everyone in the Nation."

Representing the Corps' Mississippi Valley Division at the ceremony was Director of Programs Mark Mazzanti.



Cheryl Ramsey photo

Pump station #1 will remove water from the Arkansas River.

construction until now.

However, Sullivan said he was confident of the path ahead.

"You'll see some dirt moving this calendar year," he told the crowd of about 50 people gathered under a tent for the celebration.

Sullivan has held his position with the

"This is an important step in protecting and restoring our natural resources and is consistent with the 200



Cheryl Ramsey photo

Maj. Craig Hamilton speaks about the successful collaboration between the agencies, groups and individuals involved in the project.

year working Vision of the Corps," he said. "Partnerships like this are key to our future."

Memphis District Deputy Commander Maj. Craig Hamilton also spoke at the ceremony.

"The thing I have heard most about (this project) is the successful collaboration between a wide diversity of agencies, groups and individuals that have made it possible to get to this

point today," he said.

Maj. Hamilton also talked about the regional solutions the Corps is bringing to this project.

"Two Corps districts – Memphis and Vicksburg – are ... bringing our combined knowledge and expertise to produce a regional solution," he said "We are a team of teams, devoting our most talented professionals to deliver first class water resource solutions for the people of central Arkansas."



Cheryl Ramsey photo

Everyone wanted to share in the celebration.

The \$66.5 million worth of work now scheduled, \$37 million of it from Federal sources through the

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and another \$29.5 million through the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission, will primarily consist of the two pumping stations. Station #1 is the responsibility of the Memphis District and the Little Bayou Meto Pump Station the Vicksburg District.

Memphis District's Tracy James is the Senior Project Manager for the work.

"We've all worked long and hard to get here, but days like this make it all worth the effort," James said. "Lots of other people have contributed their efforts to get us here and I am honored to be able to do my part to keep things moving and hopefully see the work through to completion."

Senior Project Manager Holly Porter leads the Vicksburg District team working on the Little Bayou Meto Pump Station.

"We are working the pump station from design to completion," Porter said of her



Cheryl Ramsey photo

Memphis District Senior Project Manager Tracy James (right), takes a moment out of his busy schedule to pose with Vicksburg District counterpart, Senior Project Manager Holly Porter.

District's involvement. "We did all the design work in house while staying in close touch with the Memphis District so that the work and our basic designs were similar."

Porter said both Districts worked to ensure there were no major differences between the two pump stations.

"Our Project Management, Engineering, and Contracting teams worked and continue to work very closely together to keep each other informed, meet our schedules and milestones and to ensure there are no surprises."

Two of the last dignitaries to speak were Sen. Mark Pryor and Congressman Marion Berry.

"This is a smart project whose time has come," Pryor told the crowd. "It's a model project that others will want to emulate."

Congressman Berry, who plans to retire following his current term in office, added, "This is an amazing example of what can happen when people come together for the common good."

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