

RiverWatch

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Memphis District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

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China, Russia, U.S. participate

Memphis District helps host international river symposium

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The week of September 20 – 24, the Memphis District took part in the Third International Symposium on Ecology and Biodiversity in Large Rivers of Northeast Asia and North America. The event kicked off Monday at the Springhill Suites Conference Center in downtown Memphis.

Building on two prior symposia in Khabarovsk, Russia (2002) and Harbin, China (2006), this symposium brought together Chinese, Russian, and North American researchers, river engineers, wetland managers, and conservation biologists to discuss local and landscape-scale management of large rivers and associated natural resources.



Cheryl Ramsey photo

Col. Vernie Reichling, Jr. (left) addresses the attendees at the Third International Symposium on Ecology and Biodiversity in Large Rivers of Northeast Asia and North America.

The symposium began with welcoming remarks from Charles Wooley of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Midwest – Great Lakes Deputy Regional Director, followed by Memphis Mayor AC Wharton and Memphis District Commander Col. Vernie Reichling.

Just before the lunch break, Mississippi Valley Division commander Maj. Gen. Michael Walsh made a presentation to the audience on the Corps' 200 year vision for the Mississippi River. Then he and Janet Sternburg of the Lower Mississippi



Cheryl Ramsey photo

Janet Sternburg (left), Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee and Maj. Gen. Michael Walsh, Commander, Mississippi Valley Division signing the Memorandum of Understanding.

River Conservation Committee (LMRCC) Chair, signed a Memorandum of Understanding between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the LMRCC.

Among the many topics covered during the week were:

- River Restoration
- Riverine and Riparian Wetland Restoration
- Biological and Abiotic Monitoring of River and Riverine Wetland Ecosystems
- Remote Sensing and GIS as a Tool for Conservation, Monitoring, and Planning
- Functional Characterization and Ecosystem Services of Rivers and Riverine Wetlands

On Thursday the group took an all-day field trip on the Mississippi River on a two-deck inspection barge on loan from the Little Rock District, pushed by the Memphis District's M/V Strong. Leaving from the Mud Island River Park they viewed the Loosahatchie Bar Aquatic Habitat Rehabilitation Project while listening to Darian Chasteen describe how the project progressed from start to finish.

Things really became interesting when members of the Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC) brought out live (and dead) specimens of different fish species that are found in the Mississippi River. Of particular interest was an alligator gar head with razor sharp teeth in a huge alligator shaped mouth. These astonishing creatures can grow up to 10 feet long and weigh up to 300 lbs.

According to the National Geographic Web site, these gars are found throughout much of the coastal U.S. Southeast. They inhabit waters as far west as Texas and Oklahoma, as far north as the Mississippi River Basin and the lower Ohio and Missouri river systems, and southern drainages well into Mexico. The alligator gar certainly lives up to it's name-sake!



Cheryl Ramsey photo

The head of an Alligator Gar with its razor sharp teeth.

After lunch aboard the M/V Strong and a discussion about Integrating Large River Flood Control, Navigation, and Environmental Benefits, the group disembarked at Tunica, Miss. and toured the Tunica River Park Museum.

Then it was time for a catfish and chicken dinner accompanied by live local music. After a long day on the river the group boarded buses and returned to Memphis.



Cheryl Ramsey photo

Ron Nassar (center) speaks to the attendees about what to expect on their tour of the Mississippi River. Left to right, an interpreter for the Chinese attendees, Tony Johnston and Darian Chasteen.

“The Russian and Chinese visitors had an outstanding day learning about the mighty Mississippi River yesterday,” Wooley said at the end of symposium Friday. “They were amazed at the power of the river, the engineering that has gone into it and the balance between engineering and Fish and Wildlife Service activities. They were also very impressed with the cooperation and coordination between federal agencies working on the river.”

In addition to the Corps of Engineers, other national agencies and organizations participating included:

- The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)
- Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee (LMRCC)
- Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association (MICRA).

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