



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**
Memphis District

News Release

Release No.

PA-07-13

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For Release:

Immediately

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Fish and Wildlife Service says Corps work will not harm woodpecker habitat

MEMPHIS, Tenn., August 2, 2007 – An important determination by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials regarding the Ivory-billed Woodpecker (IBWO) may remove a significant hurdle blocking work on a critical groundwater preservation project in the Grand Prairie Region of Eastern Arkansas.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife concluded that efforts by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to provide an alternative source of water from the White River for irrigation will not harm the habitat for the IBWO. The alternative source of water will help preserve the Alluvial and Sparta aquifers by reducing farmers' dependence on groundwater pumping.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in a letter dated July 26 by Field Supervisor Mark Sattelberg wrote, "... the (Fish and Wildlife) Service concurs with the Corps of Engineers conclusion to its Biological Assessment that the Grand Prairie Demonstration Project, which includes IBWO surveys, long term environmental monitoring and adaptive management, is not likely to adversely affect the Ivory-billed Woodpecker."

Corps officials in Memphis were pleased to receive this news, as were the project sponsors, which are the White River Irrigation District and the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission.

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“This determination is an example of the ongoing cooperative approach with other agencies and organizations that lies at the heart of all our projects,” said Col. Tom Smith, commander of the Corps’ Memphis District. “It demonstrates our ongoing efforts to strike a balance between the needs of nature and the people who live there.”

The decision builds upon the Supplemental Biological Assessment that the Corps released in June that similarly found the Grand Prairie Project would have no adverse impact to the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

The need for this determination came about as a result of court challenges brought by environmental interests alleging that work proposed by the Corps of Engineers would adversely impact the woodpecker’s habitat.

The Corps voluntarily agreed to reinstate informal consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service after an Arkansas District Court issued a preliminary injunction halting construction last August.

The letter of concurrence from the Fish and Wildlife Service, coupled with a Supplemental Biological Assessment and administrative records from the Corps and the Fish and Wildlife Service, will be submitted to the U.S. District Court.

If the court ultimately finds in favor of the Corps, this helps open the way for resuming construction of a pumping station near DeValls Bluff that will pump excess water under controlled conditions from the White River for use in crop irrigation.