

Arkansas Waterways Commission Meeting Minutes

Regular Commission Meeting, Quarter 1

10 A.M. March 12th, 2026

Arkansas Waterways Commission Office

1 Commerce Way, Little Rock, AR 72202

ACOM Rockefeller Conference Room 604

Commissioners' Present: (5) In-Person: J. Edwards, R. Chokhani, M. Lowe, M. Shell, P. and P. Harden

Ouachita River Commissioner: Vacant

Staff Present: (2) J. Bailey and C. Murphy

Commissioners Absent: (1) Clint Gaston

Guests Present: Chase Emerson, Sarah Hernandez, Geoffery Agorku, Matt Horton, Jennifer Sheehan, Allen Evens, Dr. Don Bradley, Felicia Wall, Jessica Kloss, Josh Childress, Marsha Raus, Mike Pohlman. Gene Higginbotham, Richard Brontoli, Parker McClellan, Chad Dorsey, Allison Hatfield, Pete Caubble, and Kristina Johnson.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Edwards called the meeting to order at 10:02 A.M.

QUORUM

Joe Bailey provided roll call, and a quorum was established.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Edwards asked for a motion to approve the October 9th, 2025, meeting minutes. Commissioner Lowe made a motion to approve the minutes, and commissioner Chokhani seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

Chairman Edwards asked for a motion to approve the October 23rd, 2025, special meeting minutes. Commissioner Chokhani made a motion, and Commissioner Shell seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Pete Caubble presented the financial summary report on the agency budget, expenditures, and grant funds. The Financial report showed \$31,000 in operating expense savings and \$4.3 million distributed in grants this year. Chairman Edwards asked if the finance division

will handle the grants and quarterly reports from grantees. Director Bailey responded that we would handle them while keeping the finance department informed. No further questions were raised during this report.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director Bailey reviewed activities since the October meeting and introduced Carsyn Murphy as the new Administrative Coordinator. He also attended the Arkansas Lithium Conference with the Department of Commerce and AEDC, where he promoted Arkansas waterways as an economic asset. Director Bailey referenced the five-year strategic plan approved in 2023 and invited suggestions for discussion at the next quarterly meeting.

Aquatic Nuisance Species Report- AGFC

Matt Horton from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission discussed the impact of aquatic invasive species on waterways and ecosystems. He highlighted species such as zebra mussel, Asian carp, and invasive plants like water hyacinth, explaining how they spread and harm aquatic environments. Horton noted that removal efforts have eliminated about 400,000 pounds of invasive carp but stressed that more participation is needed. He emphasized that collaboration, partnerships, and secure funding are essential to prevent and manage the spread of invasive species.

Arkansas Levees Report- USACE, Little Rock District

Commissioner Shell provided information on Arkansas levees. He emphasized the importance of levee maintenance and infrastructure to protect life and property. Lowe also discussed the potential benefit of a 12-foot channel for flood management and stressed the need for stronger oversight of levee districts and their spending.

USACE, Memphis District Projects Report

Marsha Raus discussed the maintenance of the Mississippi River and the three harbors in Arkansas. The extension of the Osceola harbor was announced. The need for funding to restore the navigation channel on the Arkansas River was mentioned. The importance of addressing environmental concerns and finding solutions for levee maintenance was emphasized.

MARVIS Maritime Vision and Intelligence System

Sarah Hernandez and Geoffery Agorku with the University of Arkansas presented their work on automated barge tracking and data collection. They discussed the use of machine learning, satellite imagery, and existing traffic cameras to track barge movements. They highlighted the potential benefits for port operators, lock and damn operators, and public

agencies. They encouraged feedback from experts in the room as they addressed the challenges faced by the industry. Potential solutions for tracking barge movement included GPS trackers and RFID. A discussion about data accuracy and cybersecurity ensued. They highlighted the need for collaboration to improve barge tracking.

OLD BUSINESS

Commissioner Chokhani conducted the rest of the meeting as Chairman Edwards stepped out. No old business was discussed.

NEW BUSINESS

Director Bailey stated that new grant applications will likely open in late 2026 or early 2027. Commissioner Shell suggested allowing private sector participation in future applications. Director Bailey and Gene Higginbotham noted that including private entities would require changes to legislation or bylaws, though private projects connected to a public port could receive funding through that port. Bailey added that further discussion on private sector involvement could occur at the second-quarter commission meeting.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:27 A.M.