

Better data explained to a wider audience is needed to garner wider support to maintain the Arkansas Waterway as a viable navigation channel, Oklahoma Waterway Advisory Board members were told during their October meeting. This data is needed to support the agricultural and industrial economies that extend beyond the borders of the two-state route. The board agreed about the need for better communications as critical needs to ensure there would be a viable waterway in the future. Three priorities to prevent the waterway from being shut down to commerce were identified at the meeting of the advisory board to the Oklahoma Department of Transportation. They are: • The Three Rivers Study, at the confluence of the Mississippi, White and Arkansas Rivers near where the waterway begins. The area has been described as a “looming threat” of being breached cutting navigation for at least a third of year. The congressional delegation of both states has written support for the project to both the Office of Management and Budget and the assistant secretary of the army for civil works. Commercial interests along the waterway have indicated they would be willing to financial participate in the study. • Increased funding to operate and maintain the waterway infrastructure so there would not be a failure shutting down the waterway. The problem is not limited to the Arkansas Waterway. The infrastructure for much of the nation’s inland waterway system has been neglected especially the Upper Mississippi, the area above the southern tip of Illinois “ including the Illinois and Ohio Rivers as well as the northern part of the Mississippi. The Lower Mississippi has no lock and dams that need to be maintained. • The third priority is to deepen the Arkansas Waterway to its 12-foot authorized depth, which would allow barges to carry heavier loads and reduce shipping costs. Presently, it is maintained at nine feet. Clint Herring, of CF Industries, said it is “important to get the numbers right” and explain to the public when the work would be done. Deidre Smith, manager of ODOT’s waterways branch, and Robert W. Portiss, director of the Tulsa Port of Catoosa, said the seven-member Mississippi River Commission, formed in 1979,

reported after its second visit to the Arkansas Waterway that the U.S. "infrastructure is degrading and under-performing." The U.S. "significantly lags" in investing in its infrastructure and should consider the Federal Aviation Administration's standards, oversight models and grant-making with airports that include system-wide public-private partnership options," the commission said in its report. Smith and Portiss said the commission, which held hearing at the Port of Muskogee, was impressed by the way all those involved in using the Arkansas Waterway in both states work together to solve problems transcending local and parochial issues, something not present on all river systems. J. Michael Patterson, executive director, said ODOT will become more active in the waterway. Patterson, attending his first meeting of the advisory board, said he plans to attend all future meetings "and be a better transportation director." He also said the department "will be prepared" to provide better access to the waterway and add access if needed. »