



## The American Waterways Operators

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Jill Bessetti  
Vice President – Southern Region

July 3, 2025

James A. Bodron  
Programs Director  
Mississippi Valley Division  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
1400 Walnut St.  
Vicksburg, MS 39180

Re: Notice of intent - 90  
FR 23920

Dear Mr. Bodron:

The American Waterways Operators (AWO) is the tugboat, towboat, and barge industry's advocate, resource, and united voice for safe, sustainable, and efficient transportation on America's waterways, oceans, and coasts. As the largest segment of the nation's 40,000-vessel domestic maritime fleet, our industry safely and efficiently moves 665 million tons of cargo each year and enables the flow of goods through ports on the inland and intracoastal waterways; the Atlantic, Pacific and Gulf coasts; and the Great Lakes. On behalf of our more than 300 member companies, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) Notice of Intent to Prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Southwest Arkansas Red River Navigation Channel Extension.

AWO is dedicated to enhancing the navigability, reliability, and safety of our nation's inland waterways systems. Our work on AWO's Responsible Carrier Program, decades-long Safety Partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard and collaboration with industry associations and allies highlight this commitment.

Extending the shallow-draft navigation channel further north on the Red River will not only facilitate the efficient and reliable flow of cargo but will reduce the need for more environmentally demanding modes of freight transportation. A single inland barge can carry as much dry cargo as 16 bulk railcars or 70 tractor trailers while emitting a fraction of the emissions of other modes. The state of Louisiana is home to a robust maritime industry and the state's inland waterways support over 140,000 jobs and contribute \$15.3 billion to the state's GSP and \$9.4 billion in personal income. The inland waterways in Arkansas support over 70,000 jobs, contributing almost \$4 billion in personal income and \$452 million in state and local tax revenue. Extending navigation further north on the Red River will help to sustainably grow economic development in the region, spurring further national growth.

The recent market analysis and economic update conducted by the Corps, reevaluating the benefits of this extension, demonstrates how this increased revenue, and efficiency could be extended well past Shreveport, Louisiana into southwest Arkansas. For example, shipping commodities by barge is often more cost effective than other modes of freight transportation. These savings would also be accompanied by a 30% reduction in transportation related-emissions if diverted from rail and close to 90% if diverted from trucks.

One significant and often-overlooked benefit of our nation's inland waterway system is its critical role in supporting homeland and national security. The existing robust infrastructure allows vessel operators to transport massive quantities of goods efficiently and at a fraction of the cost and environmental impact compared to other modes of transportation. It also presents valuable opportunities for strategic military operations. For instance, the enhanced efficiency of barge transportation could be utilized to move vehicles in bulk for repair or deployment to and from the Red River Army Depot, a vital facility responsible for maintaining and equipping military vehicles and equipment. This capability underscores the importance of extending the navigable channel, as it would provide a cost-effective and environmentally sustainable solution for supporting both commercial and national defense needs. Many AWO members have existing contracts with the U.S. military moving other strategic cargoes.

While the benefits are clear, completing this EIS will allow the Corps to better understand the costs of this extension. This is a vital step in the analytical process and AWO would be happy to assist the Corps in its evaluation with expertise from the towing industry and connect the research team with subject matter experts in other affected industries.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Notice of Intent to Prepare a Draft EIS for the Southwest Arkansas Red River Navigation Channel Extension. AWO would be happy to answer any follow up questions as requested.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jill Bessetti", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jill Bessetti  
Vice President – Southern Region