STATEMENT OF H. K. THATCHER

My name is H. K. Thatcher of Camden, Arkansas. I am Executive Vice President of the Ouachita River Valley Association which serves South-Southeast Arkansas and Northeast Louisiana.

The Ouachita River Valley Association appears today with two public witnesses—W. Edwin Cox, Chairman of the Board, and myself. The ORVA seeks legislation to amend the present authorization of the Ouachita-Black River Navigation Project to allow the cost of the additional lands needed for flooding and buffer zones in the Felsenthal Lock and Dam Navigation Pool to be made a part of the project cost.

The original authorization to change the Ouachita-Black River 6½-foot navigation project to a 9-foot project was made in 1950. At that time it was contemplated that the 9-foot depth of channel would be secured by simply dredging the channel deeper. This would have required very little additional lands to be supplied by local interests.

The Ouachita River Valley Association sponsored the project and agreed to assist in securing all of the additional lands needed for lock and dam sites, spoilage areas, and construction easements.

Further study by the Army Corps of Engineers and the Association determined that this was not a good project because the traffic on the river would have to be curtailed for the duration of the construction period which would require about ten years. After completion of the project it could only be a second rate navigation system at its best.

In 1958 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began to develop a more practical plan for securing a modern 9-foot navigation project for the Ouachita-Black River. It is proposed to secure the 9-foot channel depth by building four new high-lift locks and dams and raising the water level three feet or more within the channel rather than securing that depth by dredging. In 1960 the Congress made the alterations in the authorization of the project. (Public Law 86–645)

This final plan would allow navigation on the entire length of the 6½-foot channel to continue through the 9-foot construction period with very little interruption. It would provide modern lock chambers 9 x 84 x 600 feet. It called for the construction of forty-nine (49) sharp bend cutoffs, making all river bends have a radius of 900 feet or more. It would increase the water holding capacity of the navigation pools and give the entire project multiple-purpose status. In short, it would give the Ouachita-Black River a first-class navigation system at a much lower cost than the original authorization to dredge the channel and would also save millions of dollars in maintenance costs.

Not having encountered any major problems in Louisiana, the Jonesville and Columbia Locks and Dams are about two-thirds completed. No special problems are anticipated in the upper Calion Lock and Dam in Arkansas, but we have run into some insurmountable difficulties that local interests cannot handle in the Felsenthal Lock and Dam area in Arkansas, which is located above the Arkansas-Louisiana State Line.

Due to a peculiar geological formation in the Felsenthal Navigation Pool area, the banks of the Ouachita River are so low that the present 6½-foot navigation pool, which stands at 61.6 feet m.s.l., permanently inundates about 5,000 acres. When the 9-foot navigation project is raised to 65 feet under the Corps' final plan, an additional 9,500 acres will be permanently inundated. In addition to this the Corps of Engineers must have an elevation of approximately two feet to use as buffer zones against damages from waterlogging and wave-washing. This will require an additional 10,000 acres of land to be supplied by the local interests.

The Ouachita River Valley Association sponsored the 1960 modification of the Ouachita River Navigation Project because it was sound, economically justified, and needed for the full economic and social development of the entire Ouachita River Basin. The Association agreed to aid in securing all of the additional lands needed for inundation and buffer zones requested by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. At the time, however, the Association pointed out to the Committees of the Congress that the Felsenthal area presented a problem which might prove difficult for local interests.

In the State of Louisiana the Louisiana Public Works Department functions as the "local interests" and spreads the obligation state-wide. In Arkansas, which unfortunately does not have a Public Works Department, the individual counties involved must assume the obligation of the "local interests."