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Federal Designation Elevates Ouachita River as Marine Highway

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The Ouachita River in North Louisiana has been officially designated as United States Marine Highway Route M-167, a move anticipated to boost economic development, expand freight transport, and support rural infrastructure.

Congresswoman Julia Letlow announced that the United States Department of Transportation (DOT) granted the designation under the United States Marine Highway Program, co-sponsored by the Louisiana Department of Transportation and the Arkansas Waterways Commission, as Route M-167. The program, created under Section 1121 of the

Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, is designed to reduce highway congestion and support freight movement through the use of navigable waterways. The new status allows regional industries, local governments, and shippers along the 605-mile river to qualify for competitive federal infrastructure grants.

Letlow, who formally requested the designation in a March 2025 letter to United States Secretary of Transportation Sean P. Duffy, underscored the river's strategic importance to the region's economy. "The Ouachita River is a wonderful natural resource with vast economic potential, especially in a region built by commodities which rely on reliable modes of transportation," Letlow said in her statement. She credited the Trump Administration and Secretary Duffy for prioritizing North Louisiana and working collaboratively to "unlock our region's potential."

Leaders from the Ouachita River Valley Association, a regional advocacy group supporting river commerce and development, praised the decision. Randy Denmon, President of the association, described the designation of United States Marine Highway M-167 as a major step forward. "This provides opportunities for public and private entities along the Ouachita River to apply for federal grants. This is a great opportunity for our area," Denmon remarked.

Brandon Waggoner, Vice President of the association, echoed this optimism, calling the development a critical milestone in revitalizing the river's role in transportation and trade. "This is pretty huge! The Ouachita River brings so much to the people within the Ouachita River Basin, and we are excited to announce this major development," Waggoner said.

The United States Marine Highway Program is administered by the United States Maritime Administration and has been instrumental in improving freight networks across the country. As North Louisiana looks ahead, this designation represents a chance to modernize infrastructure, create jobs, and expand the economic reach of one of the region's most important natural resources.

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