

Governors ratify accord to protect shared waters

BY ANDREW DEMILLO THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
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Arkansas and Missouri officials agreed Monday to meet annually to study ways to protect watersheds and aquifers that cross state lines, a pact both states said would help keep water fights out of the courtroom.

Arkansas Gov. Mike Beebe signed the bi-state water agreement with Missouri Gov. Matt Blunt in Springfield, Mo. Beebe said the agreement is a contrast to the state's relationship with Oklahoma, which has sued Arkansas poultry firms over water-quality issues.

"It's better to work together than end up in court," Beebe said.

The agreement calls for Missouri and Arkansas agencies dealing with water issues to meet at least annually, starting next year, and to produce a biennial report on the status of the agreement. It also calls on the states to develop and share monitoring and modeling of water quality in their shared watersheds.

Randy Young, director of the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission, said Missouri officials had pushed for such an agreement for the past several years. Young said the state has been working with Missouri on the pact for the past few months.

Young said he believes both states will be in a better position to receive federal dollars for water-quality issues because of the agreement.

"We want to make sure that we've got comparable water-quality data that both states are collecting," Young said.

Blunt said he hopes the agreement will help the two states avoid conflicts or litigation over water-quality issues.

"Our environment and the taxpayers suffer when states are forced to spend time and money resolving disputes instead of dealing with issues directly and finding common ground," Blunt said. "This agreement is an important tool to help Missouri and Arkansas avoid unnecessary conflicts."

The agreement was announced as Oklahoma Attorney General Drew Edmondson is suing several Arkansas poultry firms in federal court, accusing them of polluting the Illinois River watershed. Edmondson filed the federal lawsuit in 2005, accusing the firms of treating Oklahoma's rivers like open sewers.

A federal judge in September denied Oklahoma's request for a preliminary injunction to stop 13 Arkansas poultry companies from disposing of chicken litter in the watershed.

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Missouri, Arkansas governors team up on water quality issues

BY CHAD LIVENGOOD • CLIVENGOOD@NEWS-LEADER.COM • NOVEMBER 24, 2008

SPRINGFIELD — Missouri Gov. Matt Blunt and Arkansas Gov. Mike Beebe signed a historic memorandum of understanding this morning at Bass Pro Shops, agreeing to work together on water quality issues along the state border.

"Watersheds and aquifers know no state borders, and interstate collaboration is essential to protecting our streams, providing healthy drinking water and planning for future water need," Blunt said during a short speech before more than 100 people on hand to see the two governors sign the pact.

Blunt and Beebe were surrounded by members of the Upper White River Basin Foundation, which works to improve underground and surface water quality along the White River, which includes Beaver, Table Rock, Taneycomo and Bull Shoals lakes.

Members of the water quality advocacy group said cooperation between Missouri and Arkansas is vital to preserving the Ozarks for generations to come.

"If we lose this thing called clean water, we lose who we are. We cannot survive," said Peter Herschend, a Branson businessman and member of the group.

Blunt, who leaves office in January, said the heads of both state's natural resources, conservation and environmental quality departments will meet biannually and put together a report for Beebe and incoming-Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon about what sort of action is needed by January 21, 2010.

Beebe said he wants to avoid the bitter clashes that his state has had in recent years with Oklahoma over pollution in the Illinois River in northwest Arkansas.

"This agreement will be an important tool to ensure Missouri and Arkansas avoid

disagreements," Blunt said.

The cooperative seeks to implement coordinated plans to protect and improve water quality and quantity along the two state's share aquifer.

"We have to have the information gathering and the sharing of that information in order to know what sort of policy directives need to be enacted to ensure we not only sustain and maintain, but improve the quality of water," Beebe said.

The joint venture will allow the two states to apply for federal grants together, Blunt said.

"That's the sort of thing the federal government looks very favorably on is bi-state cooperation," Blunt said.

Beebe added: "Trust me, EPA likes this. They don't like refereeing fights."