



Quapaw Canoe opens in style in Helena Friday- American Land Conservancy says company is perfect fit for the area

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Helena-West Helena, Ark. –

Nestled in the ideal location just yards away from the Mississippi River levee, Quapaw Canoe's newest outpost arrived in style, celebrating their official grand opening Friday with a taste of blues and canoe outings on the Mighty Mississippi. Tim Richardson, director of governmental affairs and director of the Alaska Program of the American Land Conservancy, says that the company is a perfect fit for the area and the conservation objectives of the ALC.

The objective of the ALC is the restoration of the river's flood plain aquatic and wetland restoration.

The ALC are like real estate agents who wish to find willing landowners to let the state, federal or local governments come in and restore eligible lands back to supporting mammal, fish or other life that thrives on the flood plains of the river.

So far, 25,000 acres have been restored between St. Louis and Cairo, Ill., says Richardson. Richardson said that the Florida Everglades receives billions in federal funds for restoration and so does the upper Mississippi River while the lower Mississippi River receives "virtually no funds."

"No attention, no funds," said Richardson while the opening party ensued.

A partnership of six states, the Lower Mississippi Conservation Committee has outlined a vision for the portion of the Helena River.

“We help implement the vision of the LRMCC,” said Richardson.

The hard part of implementing the vision is the fact that 98 percent of the land is privately owned.

The LRMCC is looking for owners who are willing to have the wetland restored or let the river reclaim what was originally hers.

“They are willing to pay for the land or conservation easements. They would probably be paid by federal or state agencies,” said Richardson.

Although the river is compromised, Richardson says it’s not as bad as its reputation.

“It’s a very rich resource,” he continued.

State Rep. Clark Hall is championing an effort to secure funding to buy Buck Island, which the ALC bought in 2005 for \$1.2 million. The property is 2.5 square miles, encompassing 1,500 acres of land.

Linking the vision is Quapaw Canoe. The outfit offers trips up and down the river, including the Lower Mississippi Boating and Fishing Trail.

From Helena to Arkansas City is about 126 miles of serene landscapes, abundant with wildlife and the perfect setting for a trip in a Quapaw canoe.

“Quapaw has demonstrated a high quality recreational industry ready to be developed on the lower Mississippi,” said Richardson.

“Quapaw and a greater public use of the river will create the public demand for aquatic restoration, which was the original goal,” he explained.

“We are thrilled, Helena is a unique place and no other city is situated to start this,” commented Richardson at the gathering.

With 10 million people visiting the Tunica gaming complex just across the river, Richardson thinks that Quapaw will attract tourist to the area, giving Helena-West Helena a huge boost. John Ruskey, owner of Quapaw Canoe was a very busy person Friday, as he and his pack of helpers, named the Mighty Quapaws, shuttled canoes to the river and answered hundreds of questions about boating, fishing and the animals that live in the river habitat. For more information about the conservation efforts of the ALC, visit www.alcnet.org.