

River commerce riding a wave

By [Matthew S.L. Cate](#)

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Despite swollen rivers and an economic downturn, commerce along the Arkansas River is barging ahead, already surpassing last year's tonnage.

Boosted in part by demand from steel-pipe maker Welspun-Gujarat Stahl Rohren, tonnage handled at Little Rock's river port through September is up by one-third over last year. Tonnage along the entire 445-mile McClellan-Kerr Navigation System is up more than 6 percent.

"We're going and blowing," said Paul Latture, executive director of the Little Rock Port Authority.

That wasn't the case earlier this year. Heavy rains in May wound up pushing the river-current volume as much as 10 times higher than usual. Some stretches of it were impassable after the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers shut

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Workers unload 80-foot-long pipes, bound for a Fayetteville Shale natural-gas project, from a barge Thursday at the Little Rock Port.

Photo by *Stephen B. Thornton*