



Marion Fire Department (top) was constructed largely with proceeds from the city's sale of its stake in the Smithland Dam hydroelectric project. Riverview Park (above) was developed on the Ohio River after the removal of Dam 50. When the structure was dismantled to make way for Smithland Dam, Crittenden County received the former dam property and transformed it into a recreational park.

DAM

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does not store large amounts of water but instead uses the natural flow of the Ohio to turn turbines.
At the very base of the structure, three massive bulb-type turbines sit in concrete chambers. Each turbine is 25 feet in diameter and turns at only 60 revolutions per minute – slow compared to the 3,600 RPMs of a typical coal-fired generator, but the sheer volume of water passing through the blades generates enormous torque. That rotation spins the generators in the upper levels of the powerhouse, creating electricity.
Before the river ever reaches the turbines, it passes through heavy steel trash racks at the intakes. These racks catch floating logs, trees and other debris that often sweep down the Ohio, preventing them from damaging the machinery. Maintenance crews routinely clear the screens, especially after high water events. AMP representatives say trash is removed from the screens and put into a dumpster while organic material is allowed to continue down river.
Above the turbines, the powerhouse control room looks more like a modern office than an industrial plant. From there, operators monitor river levels, turbine speeds, and energy output on multiple large television-style screens. The entire facility is staffed by only nine cross-trained employees, with one additional worker who splits time between Smithland and another AMP hydro project. The company is in early stages of a plan to engage local school districts to help train students who might find a career in dam operations.
The plant can generate up to 76 megawatts of electricity, enough to power 20,000 homes. Output fluctuates with river conditions. Too much water and the turbines cannot handle the flow; too little and the generators cannot reach capacity. On average, Smithland produces 250,000 to 300,000 megawatt-hours annually, AMP reps said.
While the hydro station is new, the dam itself is not. Smithland Lock and Dam was authorized in 1965, built through the 1970s, and completed in 1980. Its original purpose was not electricity but navigation and flood control. Two massive locks, each 1,200 feet long and 110 feet wide, sit on the Illinois side of the river and allow tows with dozens of barges to

move through. Eleven Tainter gates across the river span control the water level, raising the upstream pool about 22 feet above the downstream side.
For decades, the dam produced no power. The idea of adding hydro capacity circulated as early as the 1980s, and Marion, Ky., unexpectedly played a key role.
Former Marion Mayor Mickey Alexander recalls that the opportunity came almost by chance. “It started in the early 1980s,” Alexander said. “A man named Jim Price from South Carolina called City Hall looking for a municipal partner for a hydro project. Back then, federal rules gave priority to developers with a city partner, so he started making calls off a map. When no one answered in Paducah, he called Marion.”
Smithland didn’t even exist on the map used by Price.
Alexander, then a city council member, said City Administrator David Cobb agreed to put Price on the council’s agenda. That decision eventually gave Marion a sliver of interest in the Smithland project. For years, the plan languished as potential developers struggled to find financing. Some partners went bankrupt, and for long stretches nothing happened. But Marion’s name remained attached.
By the 1990s, U.S. Sen. Wendell Ford helped keep the license alive, and eventually AMP – then known as AMP-Ohio – acquired the rights. When AMP finally moved forward with construction, Marion negotiated a buyout of its interest.
Crittenden County Attorney Bart Frazer, who was city attorney at the time, remembers flying to Columbus, Ohio, with Alexander and then City Administrator Mark Bryant to meet with AMP.
“It wasn’t long after that trip that Marion received a check for \$1 million,” Frazer said.
Alexander said the windfall came at the right moment.
“Once we built the new City Hall, we knew we needed a modern fire department. That money funded the beautiful station we have today on Main and Bellville,” he said. “It was a happy day for Marion when that check arrived.”
Livingston County continues to benefit directly from Smithland Dam through the franchise tax it receives annually, a steady revenue stream tied to the hydroelectric station’s presence along the Ohio River. Critten-

den County, meanwhile, saw its reward at the front end of the project.
While the focus today is on Smithland, it is worth remembering that the dam replaced two earlier navigation structures with deep ties to the region. Lock and Dam 50 once stood upstream near Cave In Rock, Ill., above the Crittenden County ferry crossing. Lock and Dam 51 was located just a mile below Berry’s Ferry in Livingston County near Golconda, Ill. From the 1920s to about 1980, those two Ohio River dams served as fixtures of commerce and river traffic before they were dismantled as part of the modernization that ultimately led to Smithland Dam’s construction.
Today, there is a park at the former Dam 50 site in Crittenden County. Riverview Park has modern camping spots, a boat ramp, a seasonal pier and other amenities for campers and picnickers.
AMP today operates five hydro plants, along with one coal and one natural gas facility, and serves 130 member municipalities in nine states. It acts much like a cooperative, pooling resources for smaller municipal utilities. Paducah Power and Princeton Electric Plant Board are among Kentucky’s AMP members.
Smithland is considered one of AMP’s “crown jewels,” tour guides told those attending last week’s look at the facility.
The company employs about 210 people system-wide and has paid more than \$21 million in taxes since beginning operations. Locally, the plant has nine full-time employees who manage not only generation but also maintenance of the dam’s recreation areas, picnic shelters, fishing piers and grounds. Recreation is a mandatory part of AMP’s charge as operator of the hydro facility.
For the local leaders touring the facility, the visit was both educational and a reminder of how regional decisions can have long-lasting impact. The Smithland plant may send most of its power to cities hundreds of miles away, but its story is tied to a phone call answered at Marion City Hall more than 40 years ago.
As Alexander put it, “All we did was put our name on a document.” But in the end, it gave Marion a fire station and tied the community forever to the Ohio River dam down in Livingston County.

Water District discusses expansion, leaks, loss and pending rate hike

STAFF REPORT
Crittenden-Livingston Water District (CLWD) board met last week in regular session, discussing persistent leaks, the pending water rate increase and future expansion projects.
Superintendent Abbie Adamson reported that crews repaired nine main leaks and 23 service leaks in the previous week, but water loss remains troubling. The district lost 36 percent of its treated water in June and 38 percent in July.
“It is not looking any better for August, which has been as bad a month as we ever had,” Adamson said.
The cost of producing potable water from the Cumberland River is about \$3 per 1,000 gallons. CLWD retails water for \$3.34 per 1,000 gallons, meaning the district is operating with a thin margin, particularly when so much water is lost.
The firm Reveal has been engaged to help locate leaks. One proposal would involve placing listening devices on all customer meters to detect underground water loss, but the \$3,000-per-day cost and required district labor made the plan prohibitive.
“We still have water leaks that we cannot find,” Adamson said, noting some likely run straight down without surfacing.
The board agreed to consider other, less costly options Reveal might offer.
Board member Tim Capps raised concerns about the long-term ability to address the problem.
“Leaks aren’t going away. They are going to get worse,” he said, questioning whether the district has the resources to keep two repair crews working constantly.
Customer requests were also considered. A Mexico community resident

asked for greater relief on a bill caused by a private leak, but the board denied the request, citing its standard policy of writing off only a portion of such charges.
On capital projects, the board heard from water consultant Tim Thomas about Phase 3 of CLWD’s expansion. Since engineering firm Hussey Gay Bell is not contracted for that portion, Thomas said the district must advertise Phase 3 engineering. Phase 2 is currently about 30 percent engineered.
Thomas said securing an engineer now would position CLWD to pursue new funding opportunities and possibly expedite construction.
CLWD could theoretically have Phase 2 and Phase 3 work going on at the same time, “making this whole thing a little shorter,” Thomas said.
Expediting is considered important given Marion’s ongoing water crisis and CLWD’s recent troubles. Plans are for Marion to eventually rely entirely on CLWD. Right now, CLWD is periodically supplying Marion with about 30 gallons per minute, but only when it’s in position to do so.
The district also discussed how to use more than \$800,000 in federal grant funds awarded several years ago for line extensions. Those dollars must be spent by the end of 2026. One option could be to build lines without charging them with water until expansion is complete, though officials acknowledged residents may be frustrated with “dormant” service lines.
Meanwhile, CLWD’s pending water rate increase has yet to receive final approval from the Public Service Commission. Regulators have given preliminary approval to a smaller increase than the district originally requested.



Let there be more light

New LED lights were installed Friday at the pickleball and basketball courts at Marion-Crittenden County Park by C3 Electric, improving evening play at both courts. Additional upgrades are planned this fall, including restroom renovations, for which contractors are now being sought.

Bale Trail registration now open

Registration is now open for the 2025 Bale Trail, an annual 4-H fundraiser that showcases creative hay bale displays across Livingston County.
Crittenden County will not be having a bale trail program this fall.
The Livingston entry fee is \$20 per location, with proceeds supporting local 4-H programs. Participants must submit a written entry form and payment by Sept. 26. All displays must be visible from a public roadway and completed by noon that day to be included on the official map and considered for judging.
Both traditional fall décor and non-traditional painted or themed displays are welcome. Entries must remain family-friendly, with no political, commercial, alcohol, drug or racial content allowed.
Public voting will run Oct. 1-31, and winners will be announced Nov. 1 during the Annual Bale Blast at the Livingston County Extension Office in Smithland.
For entry forms or more information, contact Sharee Schoonover at 270-928-2168 or sharee.schoonover@uky.edu.

TAX

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introduced its tax levy during a special meeting last week, suggesting to keep the real estate and public utility property tax rate at 22.9 cents per \$100 of assessed value. The rate on personal property will be 27.1 cents per \$100.
The ordinance also proposes the motor vehicle and motorboat rates at 22.9 cents per \$100, in accordance with state law. Due to higher assessments on some properties and the addition of new property, the city expects to generate about \$57,000 in additional tax revenue at the real estate rate. That

revenue helps fund police and fire protection, street maintenance and other city services, according to the ordinance.
A second reading to make the rates official is scheduled for later this month. Once approved, tax bills will be mailed within a few weeks. Unpaid balances after Nov. 1, will be subject to a 25 percent penalty.
Crittenden County Board of Education will set its property tax rates Sept. 9. Based on earlier discussions, the district is leaning toward adopting last year’s rate with exonerations, which would result in an effective tax rate of 51.6 cents per \$100 of assessed value.

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City Council meets in regular session at city hall at 5 p.m., on the third Monday of each month