27 workers lose jobs in St. Landry

Acadiana bureau

OPELOUSAS — All but five of the 32 road-maintenance workers in St. Landry Parish have been laid off this week because of the Police Jury's financial problems, according to jury President Donald Sibille.

The remaining workers are in road districts in the Arnaudville and Sunset areas, Sibille said, and they will do a minimal amount of work. "We're just going to operate with a skeleton crew," the president said.

Sibille said part of the parish's appropriation of $480,000 from the 8g offshore mineral royalty settlement was to be used for road maintenance. "But when the governor froze the money that was it," he said.

The layoffs will prevent the parish from running up a monthly deficit of $14,000, Sibille said. "What we need now is a general tax throughout the parish."

The Police Jury began closing its administrative office on Fridays, but Sibille was at the office Friday anyway, answering the phone and taking complaints about bad roads.

Sibille said St. Landry has put up signs throughout the parish warning of substandard roads. Rainy winter has led to more deterioration of roads than usual, he said.

And bad roads lead to greater liability exposure for the parish, which cannot afford liability insurance, he said.

The layoffs are one of a series of drastic actions taken by the jury because of financial problems.

The jury filed suit last month, seeking a judge's opinion on how the available revenue should be divided up among parish agencies in 1987. The suit claims that, if all parish agencies were to be funded as requested, the jury would be $410,000 in the red.

The agencies include the 27th Judicial District Court, Sheriff Howard Zerangue, District Attorney Morgan Goudeau, Coroner Sylvan Manuel, Clerk of Court Donald Doga, justices of the peace, constables, city judges and city-court officials.

Retired Judge William A. Culpepper of Alexandria has been appointed to try the case.

Judges of the 27th Judicial District have requested a 90-day delay in bringing the case to court. The jury's attorney, Alex Andrus, said he will oppose the request.

The jury had considered filing for bankruptcy last year, but jurors eventually agreed that doing so would not solve the jury's fiscal problems.