The Atchafalaya Basin - A Time For Decision

One of the most important decisions that you, as an outdoor enthusiast, sportsman, environmentalist, conservationist - whatever sobriquet you choose - will make in your lifetime will be made very soon. More specifically, in a matter of sixty days or so, you will have the opportunity to voice your opinion regarding the fate of the Lower Atchafalaya Basin. It behooves you, therefore, to make the most of this chance because your views are important.

As reported in this column just a short while ago, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (F&WLS), after three years of deliberation, has proposed a plan to preserve the Atchafalaya Basin as it currently exists. This proposal will be the subject of public hearings which will take place during early 1979. According to what we have learned, hearings on the proposal will be held in Lafayette, Marksville, Baton Rouge and New Orleans to determine public opinion regarding which plan should be followed to retain that unique area (the Atchafalaya Basin) as it currently exists. This proposal will be the subject of public hearings which will take place during early 1979. According to what we have learned, hearings on the proposal will be held in Lafayette, Marksville, Baton Rouge and New Orleans to determine public opinion regarding which plan should be followed to retain that unique area (the Atchafalaya Basin) as it was when the Corps of Engineers first started the chain of events which has been described as the "rape of the Atchafalaya Basin."

Again, the Corps of Engineers will chair the hearings but you will have the opportunity to speak your piece, and whatever course of action is followed will depend on you. There is no denying that the Atchafalaya Basin is an area which is unique - not only in Louisiana, or the United States, but in this entire planet called Earth. There's only one Atchafalaya Basin and that's why whatever takes place here is so important.

What is the decision which is to be made? Is the selection of which plan of management which will be followed to ensure that the Basin continues to serve its place in the order of things as decreed by Nature. This decision is the concern of very citizen of our state and affords him an opportunity to change the course of history.

What are the issues? The F&WLS has estimated the cost of acquiring the acreage within the Basin which is owned by private interests as being $87 million. The landowners scoff at this suggestion. The F&WLS's own figures state that this produces an income valued at $97 million annually. Acquisition at this price would not be a bargain, it would be legalized theft.

There is more at stake than the ownership of the land within the confines of the Basin. The primary purpose of the Basin as set forth in the Flood Control Act of 1928 is to control floods and flood control isn't influenced by who owns what acreage. The Corps of Engineers has the authority to do flood control work in this area but is prohibited by law from acquiring easements on the majority of this acreage. Instead, public access to private property has been advanced as a major goal of whatever is to be done to the Basin.

Since 1975 this matter has been under consideration. There's no denying that the entire Atchafalaya Floodway is headed on a path of self-destruction - perhaps it was designed that way purposely. Siltation is rendering the effectiveness of the floodway to the point where it will be negligible. This filling-up of a waterway must be eliminated and therein lies the problem.

Since certain steps must be taken, many interest groups are involved to insure that whatever is done will serve their own purposes to the greatest extent.

It is a complicated matter but one which merits the attention of all concerned citizens who will make the decision. It is imperative, to provide absolute fairness, that the public become informed as to what is and what is not the case. There has been much mis-information about the Atchafalaya Basin during the past three years. Before taking a position the entire matter should be considered and facts, not suppositions, should be studied.

Between now and the dates of the public hearings there will be much publicity given to various facets of the Atchafalaya Plan. Please study the information given, sift the wheat from the chaff and arrive at your own decision. Then make your views known at the public hearings. It will be an opportunity for you to change the course of history. Please get involved.

LOUISIANA HIKING TRAIL DEDICATED
The Wild Azalea Trail, Louisiana's longest hiking trail is now dedicated as a National Recreation Trail. This 30-mile cross-country hiking trail came to life in the Kisatchie National Forest in central Louisiana in an unprecedented short period of time through the cooperation of individuals and agencies with achievement rather than recognition as the basic aim.

The trail is entirely within the National Forest land of the Kisatchie National Forest and boasts of outstanding scenic values. It is designated for foot travel only and consists of two distinct sections since it crosses Louisiana Highway No. 488 at about midpoint. You can hike shorter sections as numerous other Forest Service roads intersect or run close to it.

The trail is marked with yellow paint, winds through piney woods and hardwood bottoms in flat to rolling terrain. It crosses seven major creeks over log bridges and several wet areas on corduroy tread built up of bolts of timber. One could walk this trail forever and not see the same thing.

So far about 35,000 persons have used the Wild Azalea Trail. Why don't you try it?