Caroline Benosisi, 95, of Natchez, Miss., signs the roll to vote in the Tuesday election on allowing riverboat gaming.

Adams County voters approve riverboat gambling in Natchez

By The Associated Press

NATCHEZ, Miss. — Riverboat gambling in the historic Mississippi River city of Natchez won the approval Tuesday of Adams County voters.

Riverboat gambling passed 6,031 to 5,242, according to unofficial vote totals. However, gambling opponents complained Tuesday night of possible voter irregularities.

“It’s a great vote for the future of Natchez,” said Natchez Mayor David Armstrong. “We’re committed to assuring those who didn’t agree . . . they don’t have anything to worry about.”

On Monday, election officials predicted about a third of the county’s 26,487 registered voters would cast ballots. Nearly 40 percent turned out.

Gov. Ray Mabus said Tuesday night he was happy the issue had gone before voters. “I was glad it went to a referendum. I always trust the voters,” he said.

Polls opened at 7 a.m. and closed at 7 p.m.

Several hundred absentee ballots were filed, said Mabel McMillan, chairwoman of the Adams County Election Commission.

The vote comes only a week after a gambling boat issue was defeated in Washington County by a vote of 4,785 to 4,531. Developers had proposed a dockside casino on Lake Ferguson near the Mississippi River.

The only hurdle left in the path of Riverboat Corporation of Mississippi’s planned $18 to $20 million development at Natchez Under-the-Hill is a decision by the state Supreme Court on whether riverboat gambling is considered a lottery.

“I feel satisfied because of the large turnout. Anyway you read the votes in the precincts, it was a decision of this area,” said William A. Wiltshire, Riverboat Corporation president.

Wiltshire, a lifelong resident of Pike County and now an attorney in McComb, plans a development that includes a 1,000-passenger, multi-decked riverboat at a floating dock that will feature lounges, offices and gift shops.

Wiltshire has said that the development will employ 487 people with an estimated payroll of $14 million annually.

Voters in Harrison, Hancock and Jackson counties go to the polls on Dec. 4 in a similar election. On Dec. 11, residents of Warren County will vote.

Legislators cleared the way this year for casinos on ships on the Gulf Coast and on the Mississippi River, but left the final decision with voters.

Adams County Together Against Gambling is not conceding Tuesday’s election. Moderator Dale Little said the group had several questions about the way votes were taken from the voting machines.

Little said he plans today to question the Adams County Election Commission on the matter.

“We are not conceding the election. If this is not the case, we’ll concede the election and go from there,” Little said.