Agreement May End Basin Fight

By NANETTE RUSSELL
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BATON ROUGE — The 10-year battle over the Atchafalaya Basin may finally be resolved, Gov. Dave Treen announced Thursday.

Treen, flanked by members of environmental groups, said a combination of recent developments will solve the controversy surrounding the basin. Among those are: a donation of more than 60,000 acres of land in and around the basin by Dow Chemical Co.; an agreement by landowners to sell to the state; and a revised flood control easement plan.

"This is a great victory for the people of Louisiana," Treen said. "The hopes and aspirations for all concerned in the lower Atchafalaya Basin will be met."

The state presently owns 150,000 acres of the river basin. Treen said with the donation and purchase of additional land, about 240,000 acres or 40 percent of the basin will be available for public access.

The Dow Chemical donation is located mostly within the basin in Iberville, St. Martin and Iberia parishes.

Bill Neely, Dow Louisiana Division general manager, said the company donated the land partly because it has been concerned with the problems of the basin.

Impact On Future

"This donation will have great impact on the future of the basin," Neely said. He added that state ownership "will ensure environmental and recreational interests."

Treen said the new plan, which he called his major accomplishment since taking office, has received "total support" from naturalists, environmentalists and landowners.

Oliver Houck, vice president of the National Wildlife Federation, said the new development is "a very bright light on an otherwise dim horizon." He added that the plan is "nationally speaking, a biggie and of enormous national significance."

Houck said there is no single resource area south of Alaska which is more important.

Treen was also lauded by representatives of the Save the Atchafalaya Basin, the Louisiana Sierra Club and the Louisiana Wildlife Association.

Newman Trowbridge of the Louisiana Landowners' Association, said the plan is the culmination of many months of "sincere dialogue between all those involved" and is one which basin landowners find acceptable.

"The complete plan will serve the basin and the people of the state well in the future," Trowbridge said.

More Funds Needed

Treen estimated the purchasing of the private land will cost $50 to $55 million. He added that he will seek state and federal funds to acquire the land.

Flood control, which will be entirely federally funded, will be tightened to cover the entire basin to prevent conversion from its natural state, Treen said. In addition, the state presently owns 150,000 acres of the basin.

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