Atchafalaya Basin development plan taking shape

By MIKE DUNNE
Advocate staff writer

The Atchafalaya Basin master plan is beginning to move from paper to actual projects.

The advisory committee that helped devise the plan listened to reports Wednesday on several projects and plans, some funded by the first installment of the $85 million, 15-year master plan approved by the Legislature this year.

That state money matches about $250 million from the federal government over the same period.

The state budget this fiscal year includes $3 million for projects and $700,000 for daily operations, said Sandra Thompson, director of the Department of Natural Resources' Atchafalaya Basin Program and chairman of the advisory committee.

At 800,000 acres, the Atchafalaya Basin is the largest river basin swamp in the nation.

Recreation is a major focus of the plan and local sponsors — cities, parishes or levee boards — must come up with matching money and money to maintain whatever facilities are constructed, said Sandra Thompson, director of the Department of Natural Resources' Atchafalaya Basin Program.

The committee heard reports on plans for:

- Belle River boat landing. The plan calls for a 300-foot floating dock. At times, 500 boats try to use the landing, said consultant Ned Cole. Plans include a snack bar to bring in income, he said. Some businesses have protested the snack bar plan and negotiations are planned, Cole said.

- Marshfield Landing, a boat ramp to service Lake Fausse Pointe and other waters in the area. Jim Anderson of Iberia Parish said the current launching facility is just a single ramp and boat trailers are often parked a half-mile away.

- A park on Lake Palourde on La. 70 to link with Lake End Park on the northern edge of Morgan City. Mayor Tim Matte of Morgan City said the city wants to build a rock dam 400 feet into the lake and backfill the area with dredged material from the basin. "It is going to allow us to be a gateway" to the basin, to link disadvantaged youth with disabled children, Trosclair said.

- A camp for disabled youth and underprivileged children north of Butte La Rose. Fleming Trosclair of the National Rehabilitation Resources Center said he hopes to make more then 600 acres available. "That disadvantaged youth is going to find out they have a pretty good life," said Trosclair, who is from Harvey.

- An interpretive center in Morgan City. Consultant LuCutrera said the facility would provide a cultural ecology center, space for state agency regulators and researchers, and an educational center. Funding questions are not yet settled, Cutrera said.

- A Welcome Center at Butte La Rose. The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development will fund 80 percent of it, Thompson said.

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The Atchafalaya plan has 80 acres for the camp but Trosclair is working with local land owners to try to make more then 600 acres available. It will be closed during hunting season, he said.