Atchafalaya Basin Swamp Park Is Recommended

Unanimous Vote Follows Martin’s ‘Hopscotching’

By G. MICHAEL HARMON
Baton Rouge, La. (AP) — In a rare display of unanimity, the Governor’s Commission on the Atchafalaya Basin Monday approved a final report to the Legislature, recommending the development of a 235,000-acre state-managed recreation area in the South Louisiana swamp wilderness.

The unanimous vote was attributed to a round of behind the scenes negotiation conducted by Secretary of State Wade O. Martin Jr., commission chairman, between warring conservationist and landowner factions on the panel.

PRESENT BASIN

—The state “put forth every effort to preserve the basin as an entity and to preserve its swamp ecosystem of annual flooding and de-watering.”

—Any land purchased or leased by the state for the basin recreation area be through negotiations not expropriation.

The decision foreclose expropriation was a victory for the landowners.

GAVE STATE CHANCE

“The conservationists are willing to give the state a chance,” Schueler said. “The only possible means the state can use is some sort of comprehensive land use policy for the entire area, including, if necessary, zoning restrictions.”

“If the state cannot come up with such a meaningful policy, the conservationists feel that they have not in any way bound their hands, and will proceed after this legislative session in actively seeking a national recreation area in the basin.”

Landowners have been strongly opposed to any mention of a national recreation area because of strict federal regulations on the use of recreation lands for commercial development.

Martin estimated that it would take a state appropriation of $9 million, in addition to another $9 million in federal matching funds, to develop the commission’s plan for a recreation area.

Under the commission proposal, the state would purchase about 21,500 acres and lease and lease another 800,300 acres for a multi-use recreation area.

Capital improvements to the 1,000-acre state park adjacent to Interstate 10, would be made only on state-owned lands.

Leased lands would include game management areas for hunting, camping areas and hiking trails.

The recreation area could be controlled by a state agency which would be granted the “Authority and the means to preserve the basin and to operate the facilities developed.”

The commission report also called for help from the U.S. Corps of Engineers to solve the immediate problem of silting, which is threatening to kill the basin as a swamp.

The 235,000 acres that the commission recommended for development as a recreation area represents about half of the basin between Krotz Springs on the north and Morgan City on the south.

A commission study has projected that the development would bring in about $46 million year in tourist dollars.

Martin said he was delighted the commission was able to come to a unanimous decision following almost a year of in-fighting between the conservationists and landowners.

“I feel very strongly that the success of our effort depends on an extreme extent on the unanimity of its final report,” Martin said.

The commission was created by Gov. John McKeithen in May, 1971, in the wake of a rising squabble between the conservationists and landowners over the future of the basin.