Atchafalaya May Become Wilderness Area Preserve

PORT ALLEN — The Atchafalaya Basin Council has unanimously passed a resolution asking Congress to preserve and enhance the basin as a wilderness area and as a fish and wildlife habitat.

Approval of the resolution came at a meeting of the council here Thursday night.

According to B.E.M. Skerrett, III of Lafayette, president of the council, the group seeks approval of the resolution by Congress.

The resolution stresses that the basin's functions as a wilderness area and fish and wildlife habitat be given equal consideration to that of flood control and navigation in all planning, studies and construction.

Moreover, the proposed Congressional resolution would require the Corps of Engineers and the Department of the Interior "to begin immediately on a co-operative study of the basin to determine what measures will be necessary to preserve and enhance the fish and wildlife features of the basin," Skerrett said.

The resolution would also require the Corps of Engineers and the Department of the Interior to "consult immediately with other appropriate federal agencies and state and local agencies of the State of Louisiana to ascertain what emergency measures, if any, should be utilized to prevent deterioration of the basin during the period in which they are conducting their study."

The resolution was prepared by a committee headed by Vernon Behrhorst, assistant professor of geography, at the University of Southwestern Louisiana. In explaining the resolution to the Council, Behrhorst said that at the present time the Corps of Engineers is limited by law in what it can do with regard to fish and wildlife in the basin. He further stated that if Congress passes the resolution, the Corps of Engineers would be given the green light to take positive action with regard to fish and wildlife in the basin.

Members of the committee, besides Behrhorst, are Sen. Edgar Mouton, Jr. and Representatives J. Burton Angelle, Steven Dupuis, and Thomas Hoffman.

In his report to the council