Atchafalaya Swamp getting transformed into a garden, sanctuary

By Jonas Breaux
Staff Writer

HENDERSON — A wooded, swampy parcel of land near here will soon be home to the Lynch Botanical Gardens and Bird Sanctuary. The 100-acre site will be located approximately seven miles from here off the Atchafalaya Basin Levee road and across Bayou Amy on property owned by St. Martin Land Company.

"Our company has been putting together a use plan for the 32,000 acres we own in the basin and this is just the kind of project we are looking to get involved in," said Jake Trewin with St. Martin Land Co. "For many years our company has chosen to keep a low profile in the area but the trust of our new use plan is to become more involved with community projects.

"We have embarked on a strategy to utilize our surface resources and at the same time preserve the beauty and environmental quality of the land," he said.

State Rep. Sydnie Mae Durand (D-Parks), who was instrumental in linking St. Martin Land with project manager Mary Courville says the botanical gardens and bird sanctuary will be a boon for the parish.

"It's not too often that you can get a project like this one in your back yard," Durand said. "This is not only a terrific family-oriented attraction but it also will attract researchers on a national and international level.

Courville had originally considered sites in Lafayette Parish for the gardens but problems with lease agreements stymied her efforts.

"God must have been trying to tell me something," Courville said of her unsuccessful efforts to secure a site near Lafayette, "because the site we have is so beautiful, teeming with natural vegetation, wildlife and filled with song birds, wading birds and waterfowl."

The project will cost approximately $23 million, with the first stage scheduled for completion in about two years. Plans include a variety of gardens, a conservatory, a waterfowl area as well as a research facility.

"The center-piece of the project will be the conservatory, where visitors will be able to stroll beneath trees laden with flowering orchids and Bromeliad, past pools bordered by lush ferns," she said.

Architect Steve Oubre says the facility will provide to the community over its life. That means you can increase its value by 90 percent.

Courville said the research facility will be operated in tandem with USL. The facility will include two classrooms and a research laboratory.

"A project like this one will definitely provide an economic boost to the area," Oubre said. "The cost of the project will only reflect 10 percent of what the facility will provide to the community over its life. That means you can increase its value by 90 percent."

This wooden area across from the Cypress Cove Landing on the Atchafalaya Basin Levee road southeast of Henderson is part of a 100-acre tract which will be home to the Lynch Botanical Gardens and Bird Sanctuary.

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