An Iberia Parish government study released Tuesday shows fecal coliform bacteria counts in the Bayou Teche are far higher than state health standards. The results stirred talk of possibly closing the Teche.

According to the parish study, the overall fecal coliform (which includes E. Coli) count for the four-month testing period is almost eight times higher than state Department of Environmental Quality guidelines for safe swimming levels and about 35 percent higher than the boating standard.

The surprisingly high numbers concern Iberia Parish President Will Langlinais, who said he believes the Teche could very well be closed soon.

"I would never swim in the Teche, but I didn't think the results would be that high," Langlinais said. "We have to get with public health experts and state officials to follow this up, but I think it's obvious that the Teche is going to be posted (prohibited swimming and possibly boating)."

However, Langlinais said before such a closure, all of the ramifications need to be considered, including the potential economic impact. It is not certain if any potential boating closure would affect the large sugar barges that use the Teche or any of the boat-builders along its banks.

Last October, after Dr. David Tate's advanced biology class at the Episcopal School of Acadia found traces of the E. Coli bacteria in 19 of 20 sites around the parish, the parish council voted to fund a study of the waters of the Teche.

Tate was stunned by the results of the tests.

"These are some incredibly high numbers," Tate said. "I am very concerned."

Environmental activist Mary Tutwiler, who chairs the parish's recycling and environment advisory committee, echoed Langlinais' and Tate's concerns.

"If the previously released DEQ numbers were not enough to cause people to stop and think, these new numbers certainly should," Tutwiler said. "We really need to do something. Clearly, the Teche needs to be posted."

But before such a drastic move is taken, DEQ and Department of Health and Hospitals officials must take another, more detailed, series of samples, said DEQ program manager Emelise Cormier.

The last major river or bayou the DEQ and DHH closed was the Tangipahoa River, after test results showed even higher concentrations of fecal coliform bacteria than the Teche figures.