Basin Commission To Poll Owners

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) - The governor's commission on the Atchafalaya Basin today voted to poll property owners in the area on a proposal to create a national recreation area in the controversial area. Commission chairman Wade O. Martin Jr. said it was imperative to learn the position of property owners before proceeding with the development of any recreation plan for the area.

"It has been said in the past that land owners have not been given a sufficient voice in what is to be done with their property," said Martin, secretary of state.

Need Expression

"I believe individual property rights are important enough to give the owners an opportunity to express themselves," he said.

The basin, called the greatest hardwood forest in North America and the last swampy wilderness in the country, has been suggested as a natural site for a public recreation area.

Controversy has swirled around the idea, with the 1970 Legislature endorsing the federal recreation concept and the 1971 Legislature recommending the state protect private property, timber and mineral rights in the area.

Divergent Stands

Various interest groups have taken widely divergent stands in connection with how to use the area, a banana-shaped region running through the south-central part of the state.

It was evident at the opening of the hearing, the commission's first full scale meeting on the question of the recreation area, that there is a wide gulf separating property owners, oil and timber interests, and conservation representatives.

The meeting had barely started before Hugh Vick, representing the Louisiana Forestry Association, challenged the basin premise of a need for a national recreation area.

No Demonstration

"It has never been demonstrated that there is a need for a recreation area," Vick said.

"We are treading on thin ice when we invite these people (the federal government) in here to do something we can do ourselves."