The federal government will provide $12 million to buy 15,225 acres in the Atchafalaya Basin to create a wildlife refuge, Rep. John Breaux announced Friday.

Another $300 million for an even larger basin land purchase remains tied up in a federal conference committee as part of an energy and water projects bill.

The $12 million made available Friday will be used to purchase land east of the current Sherburne Wildlife Management Area.

A problem had arisen with the purchase because the original appropriation had only provided $10 million, but the land appraised for more, according to Breaux, D-Crowley.

The original bill said that if the allocation fell below the appraisal, additional money could be released if the responsible subcommittee chairmen gave their approval.

The Senate chairman had already agreed to do so and Friday the chairman of the appropriate House committee signed off on the additional funds, Breaux said.

“The House Interior Appropriations Committee chairman agreed to release these funds after I spoke with him Thursday about the importance of this refuge to the people of Louisiana,” Breaux said.

It was a necessary congressional procedure, but one that does not require full congressional action. The action had already received the approval of the Reagan administration earlier this week, according to a Breaux spokesman.

“The money is there,” he added. “It means the checks can be issued to actually purchase the property.”

The refuge includes tracts in Iberville, Pointe Coupee and St. Martin parishes.

This first federal money for purchasing and protecting the basin comes out of the Interior Department’s budget.

The big land buying authorization is in an energy and water projects bill, still stalled in a house-senate conference committee. That bill would put the major land buying in the hands of the Corps.

Several years ago, Dow Chemical Co. donated more than 50,000 acres of basin land, serving as the catalyst for a compromise in the real estate portion of a multi-purpose plan for the floodway that was being developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The first state purchase of land for the program came when Gov. David Treen created the Sherburne Wildlife Management Area on 10,232 acres bought for $12.2 million.

Last year, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries added to that area, purchasing a 1,547-acre tract for $1.8 million.