By MATT SCALLAN
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BATON ROUGE — Atchafalaya Basin landowners have proposed an alternative plan to the one wanted by Gov. David Treen which they say will preserve the environment of the basin, provide for public access and preserve their private property rights.

Newman Trowbridge of Lafayette, general counsel of the Louisiana Landowners' Association, unveiled a plan Thursday in which the state would assist the federal government in buying 45,000 acres of land in the basin for public use at a total cost of $121 million. Another 40,000 acres would be donated to the state.

Treen's proposal asks the federal government to buy timber and public access rights to 103,000 of the basin's 443,000 acres.

TROWBRIDGE labeled "fantasy" Treen's hope that the federal government would pay for the entire project. He said the state should consider spending part of the $235 million earmarked for the Enhanced Mineral Income Trust Fund as the state's share of the project.

The landowners contend that the Treen plan, which has been adopted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, would make them liable for damages should nature-loving visitors to the basin be involved in an accident.

Trowbridge said the "greenbelt" portion of the plan an attempt to gain control of the entire basin. Under that part of the proposal the state would acquire surface rights to 22,500 acres of land in 300-foot strips on each side of the basin's navigable waterways.

"When you control the point of access, you control the area behind it," he said. The greenbelts would mean the end of the hunting clubs in the basin, Trowbridge said. Instead, the landowners want to sell the state three tracts of land 5,000 to 20,000 acres in size. One would be upland area, another would be a fishing area and the third would be cypress-tupelo lowlands.

Landowners would keep their mineral rights under both plans.

TROWBRIDGE SAID Treen had probably been convinced by legislators that widespread support for the plan is not there, because lawmakers want to spend the money on other projects.

"We believe that the support is there," he said.

Landowners will conduct a campaign to educate the public on their plan in the months ahead.

The Corps is scheduled to begin public hearings on its version in Baton Rouge July 14. Hearings in Lafayette, Jonesville and New Orleans will follow at two-day intervals. The hearings will include the flood protection provisions, which will cost about $41.3 billion.

The Corps' flood protection plan, which includes work on the old River Control Structure at the mouth of the Atchafalaya and on the levees throughout the basin, has been authorized but not funded by Congress.

The environmental aspect of the basin has been neither funded, nor authorized so there is still room for change, Trowbridge said.

The landowners' plan was developed with and is acceptable to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, according to Trowbridge, but he would not reveal who had participated in drawing up the plan.

He did say that three corporations own 60,000 of the 90,000 acres the landowners hope to sell to the state, but would not say who they are.

The plan is a compromise between environmentalists, who want the government to buy all of the basin's 443,000 acres, and the landowners, who don't want to sell any of it. Under the proposal, however, those who sell the land to the government would be "willing" (Please turn to next page)