State to kick off $3.4 million attraction in Butte La Rose

Ron Delhomme
St. Martin Bureau Editor

BUTTE LA ROSE — Six state secretaries gather here today to begin a project to turn the Interstate 10 rest area here into a $3.4 million tourist attraction.

They will sign a memorandum of understanding to design, build and operate a welcome center, a nature trail system and a children's fishing pier, according to Jack Caldwell, secretary of the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism.

Caldwell and his counterparts from the Environmental Quality, Natural Resources, State Lands and Parks, Transportation and Development, and Wildlife and Fisheries will meet at the I-10 rest area to sign the document at 9 a.m.

The facility will be part of the state's Atchafalaya Basin Master Plan, a $338 million project designed to keep the Basin "wet and wild," according to Sandra Thompson, executive director of the project.

The federal government has kicked in $250 million and Thompson says she is confident the remaining $85 million will be funded by the state beginning this Legislative session and extending more than 15 years. About $3 million will come from other federal sources, grants and local funding.

The Butte La Rose area is being designed as the gateway to the Basin for tourists traveling on I-10, she said.

There will be an information center with audio and video displays of the Basin and its attractions. Naturalists will be on duty to give seminars and directions. There will be a gift shop.

Also included are picnic areas on Lake Pelba within walking distance of the information center. Nature trails, a snack bar and the fishing pier, complete with equipment rentals, complete the package.

The boat launch area will also be renovated to accommodate tour boats and the landing will be expanded to five lanes.

Upgrades will be made to the boat launch, parking area and access road. The cost for this part of the project is $545,000.

Meanwhile, in Henderson, plans for a $4.3 million addition to the area's tourist attractions are on track, Thompson said.

Henderson will receive an elevated walkway along the old levee from I-10 to McGee's Landing. Spur trails will lead into the Basin to an observation deck in a cypress grove. Also planned are a bicycle trail, bulkheads for tour boat landings and improvements to an existing alligator nesting area.

The plan also called for a $6.7 million Atchafalaya Wilderness Area in Catahoula, but residents there turned it down last year in an unofficial referendum.

The state's share of the funding for the 15-year project is about $5 million for the upcoming fiscal year. The Legislature will decide the funding issue when it votes this session on state Rep. Butch Gautreaux's HB1262, co-authored by Rep. Sydnie Mae Durand, D-Parks, and Sen. Craig Romero, R-New Iberia, among other South Louisiana legislators.