Ben Skerrett, who attended Thursday's press event, cruises around the Atchafalaya Basin in this August 1998 photo. Skerrett, a long-time promoter of the Basin's welfare, says he is hopeful plans will work.

Federal, state agencies show off plans for Atchafalaya project

Ron Delhomme
St. Martin Bureau Editor

BUTTE LA ROSE — An agreement between state and federal agencies became official Thursday when the heads of six of those agencies signed a memorandum of understanding to jointly build, operate and maintain the Atchafalaya Basin Welcome Center.

The $3.4 million project is the first and one of the largest of 25 to be built during the 15-year, $338 million Atchafalaya Basin Master Plan, designed to enhance recreation, tourism and protection for the Basin.

The Louisiana Department of Natural Resources is the lead state agency for the master plan. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is the lead federal agency.

Sandra Thompson is the executive director of the Atchafalaya Basin Program for the DNR and an advocate for Basin preservation for more than 25 years.

“Legislation being considered in this session of the Legislature will authorize the $85 million program over a 15-year period, to be matched with a $250 million authorization from Congress through the Corps of Engineers,” Thompson said.

Participating in Thursday’s signing were Jack Caldwell, secretary of DNR; Kam Movassaghi, secretary of the Department of Transportation and Development; Phillip Jones, secretary of the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism; Dale Givens, secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality; Jimmy Jenkins, secretary of the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries; and Charles St. Romain, director of the State Land Office.

Ben Skerrett, who attended Thursday’s press event, is a long-time promoter of the Basin's welfare. He spoke recently of the Basin’s importance to Louisiana life.

“I’m very hopeful this will work. My whole contention since 1970 has been we needed land and water management studies and a plan and I’m extremely glad this is come to pass,” Skerrett said.