Buried treasure?
Park’s problems surfacing

Lost positions - Deteriorating conditions - Poor management. A simple drive by Chicot State Park, the state’s largest and arguably the most beautiful recreational park in Louisiana, may prompt you to believe it looks like any other state park. Enter the front gate. Look around. Unfortunately, what you’ll find is no buried treasure, but rather a precious gem loosing value right before your very eyes.

Lost positions

Last year, in an article titled “Crusader for Chicot Park”, local businessman John LaHaye wondered aloud, “This park used to have a lot of workers and equipment. I’d like to know how many positions have been taken away from here?”

Good question - Here’s the answer. According to information collected during an extensive investigation, the answer is 12 titled positions and several pieces of equipment.

Chicot used to have a cabinet maker. That employee was responsible for making signs as well as performing other skilled duties. The sign-making machine and a host of tools were moved to another park. The title was abolished.

The park also touted an Operator II position. This worker was responsible for operating bulldozers, front end loaders and wench trucks. Two bulldozers, two wench trucks and a front end loader were taken to another park. Needless to say, the title disappeared.

Other lost positions were: Mechanic III - When this employee retired the position was never replaced; Traders Helper - Abolished; Plumber/Maintenance III - After the employee retired, the vacancy was never refilled; Electrician - Abolished; Painter - Employee

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GARBAGE DUMP- Glass bottles, aluminum cans, disposable diapers and other trash were clearly visible in the lake during the fall drawdown. Was it removed before the lake was refilled? Answers and other details in Part Four next Sunday. (Gazette photo by Jeff Guillory)

TREASURE

retired and was never replaced; Maintenance Foreman - Employee retired and never replaced; Typist Clerk III - Employee laid off during state cutback in late 1980s. The position was refilled in 1989 as a Typist Clerk II (less pay); Clerk III - Employee terminated and position was never refilled.

Chicot also lost two other significant positions in recent years. The position of Ranger Specialist was opened in 1987 for Lillian "Jo" Edwards. On August 7, 1989, Edwards was promoted to Park Manager Trainee. The Ranger Specialist position was never refilled. The Park Manager Trainee, also recognized as Assistant Manager, was later vacated when Edwards was promoted to Manager. Assistant Manager, a position which exists at nearly every park in the state, ceased to exist at the park, located seven miles north of Ville Platte.

Currently, Chicot has seven maintenance employees, four rangers and a clerk. When Manager Jo Edwards is off on Wednesdays and Thursdays or out of town, no one is officially in charge of the park's operations.

Ironically, Sam Houston Jones Park, located outside of Lake Charles, employs an assistant manager, three rangers, clerk, gate attendant, and three maintenance personnel. The park, managed by District Manager Fred Powell, is one-third the size of Chicot.

The Gazette has learned that Jo Edwards suffered a heart attack Thursday evening. The 43-year old is currently in the Intensive Care Unit at St. Francis Cabrini Hospital in Alexandria. Currently, the park is without an administrator or acting manager. However, Powell informed workers that he will come in once a week while Edwards is out to "keep an eye on the things".

Next: What really happened to Chicot Lake during the fall drawdown? The answers may surprise you.

Also, the issue of abandoned buildings is raised. Part Four will also contain updates on conditions reported earlier.