The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will begin this morning allowing more Mississippi River water to pour into the Atchafalaya River, a corps spokesman said Friday.

The move may help the wild crawfish supply bounce back faster from this past year's drought.

Maj. Gen. Phillip Anderson, president of the Mississippi River Commission, on Friday approved Gov. Mike Foster's request to divert a limited amount of fresh water into the Atchafalaya, said John Hall, corps spokesman.

"The real solution is rainfall," Hall said Friday, adding that a storm that was expected to pass through the state Friday night might bring some relief.

On Thursday, U.S. Sen. John Breaux, D-Crowley, urged the governor to make the request. A Foster spokeswoman said Thursday that he had been planning to do so.

The corps' Old River Control Structure ensures that only a portion of the Mississippi's water flows down the Atchafalaya. The huge weir keeps the Mississippi from changing its course into the Atchafalaya, which flows over lower ground.

Under federal law, only 30 percent of the Mississippi's water may flow down the Atchafalaya. However, the corps can change the percentage under certain circumstances.

Hall said Friday that beginning at 7 a.m. today and for the next two weeks, the percentage will be raised to 32, the same as when the corps upped the level in 1996.

"This action will slow the fall of the river. This will produce stages about 1 foot higher than would have been without additional water," Hall said.

LSU aquaculture expert Greg Lutz said that it may be too late for this year's crop, but even if it is, the diversions would let crawfish populations recover more quickly from the past year's drought.

The Atchafalaya Basin supplies much of the state's wild crawfish, while farmers in southwest Louisiana raise crawfish in man-made ponds, often in rice fields, between growing seasons.