Crawfish ponds increase Bayou Portage flood area

By M. Scott Morris
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ST. MARTINVILLE - The St. Martin Parish Police Jury is seeking $1.5 million to curtail flooding problems in approximately 36,300 acres of the parish.

“The Bayou Portage isn’t causing drainage problems right now,” said Parish Administrator Gerard Durand Jr. Henderson, “but during heavy rains, several areas flood.”

Penso engineer Pete Hoppe said the problem includes Breaux Bridge, Henderson and Catahoula.

“The (problem area) borders I-10 from Breaux Bridge to Henderson,” he said.

Bayou Portage serves as an important drainage canal for the area, carrying run-off water to Bayou Berard, which empties into Catahoula Lake and a borrow pit on the west side of the levee, Durand said.

“All that water eventually flows down through Morgan City, eventually dumping into the Gulf of Mexico,” Durand said.

Scott Angelle, jury president, said Bayou Portage has become overgrown with plants and trash in some areas.

“We need to clear the canal, widen it and deepen it,” Angelle said.

Angelle said modern-day farming practices, the construction of crawfish ponds and increased urbanization, especially near I-10, has contributed to the problem.

“The crawfish ponds are now in areas that used to serve as reservoirs during heavy rains,” Angelle said. “Now there are fewer places for the water to go, so we have increased flooding.”

Not only do urbanization and farming techniques use land that had served as reservoirs, they also cause increased run-off.

“Water on the street has to go somewhere,” Angelle said.

Penso is conducting a survey of the bayou to determine what areas are causing the most problem.

When that information is compiled, the jury will submit an application for money from the capital outlay fund of the state budget.

Angelle said money from the state will be necessary to conduct the project.

“This is a major project and we’ll need state and/or federal money to get it done,” Angelle said.

“We don’t have the money.”

The application for state funds must be completed by November.

“We’ll find out if the project is approved sometime in April,” Angelle said.

“The money should come shortly after.”