Delcambre Residents Worried About Future

By DAN EVAN
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DELCAMBRE — Nolan Landry spent most of the day Friday answering questions.

The bridge tender of the Delcambre Canal, Landry says he was busy all day hearing from residents concerned about the effect of the salt mine flooding on Delcambre's town and fishing industry.

What he had to tell them didn't seem to bode well for the town's future.

"This has been going on now for 30 hours and still the mine isn't filled. There is no way to stop the flow. If you did, it just would come in some other way," he said.

Late Friday afternoon, Landry said water was still backing up into the lake and mine at about 15 knots — or about 27 miles an hour. Usually, the water flows slowly out from the lake into the Gulf.

Many of those who gathered along the canal and talked to Landry worked in the Diamond Crystal Salt Co. mine, but he said most miners had little to say about the accident, because the company had forbidden them to discuss it.

"They all know that this is the end," said Landry. "I was up there yesterday and now I hear the fissure is three quarters of a mile wide, and they know nothing can be done to repair that."

One of the curious gathered at the bridge was 67-year-old Joseph Edward Boudreaux of Erath.

"There is no mine anymore. There is no way there could be," Boudreaux said. "My daddy worked up there and he told me how big it is, and it's all flooded now."

The salt miners work at four levels, beginning at a depth of 900 feet and running down to 1,400 feet. Each level is wider than the one above.

Miners carve out 90-foot square areas of the pure salt. They leave 90-foot wide pillars in between the caverns.

Many of the local citizens work in the mine, which employs about 250 persons and produces about 100,000 tons of salt a year. Most of the other residents are involved in the seafood industry.

Mayor Theo Perrin was worried about the economic future of his town.

"The lake was a great spawning ground for catfish, and we were just beginning to clean it up to make it a recreation area," said Perrin. "And we wanted the lake also to provide a haven for shrimp boats during hurricanes and storms. Now we may have nothing."

Veldon Landry, operator of one of the many seafood companies along the canal said he didn't think the accident would damage the shrimp industry.

Landry said the main problem in the near future would be freeing shrimp boats which were cracked as they were grounded by the rapidly dropping water in the canal.

"You might as well forget the lake for a couple of years when it comes to fishing," Landry added. "It'll take at least that long for it to recover if it does."

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