Acadiana bureau

VILLE PLATTE — The Evangeline Parish Police Jury laid off 13 employees Tuesday and closed its equipment-maintenance facility as a result of losing $273,000 in state funds.

Jury Secretary-Treasurer Wilbert Ardoin said nine employees will be fired from the road-crew department, two mechanics from the equipment-maintenance facility and one each from the central office staff and the drainage department.

The action becomes effective Jan. 31.

In the road-crew department, the nine will be taken from the following regions: two from Region A (the Ville Platte city area), three from Region B (Ward 1 outside of Ville Platte), two from Region C (Ward 3) and two from Region D (Wards 4 and 5).

That leaves 24 road employees to maintain hundreds of miles of parish roads. The current jury began its term in office three years ago with 47 road employees.

In addition, the jury voted to stop giving the parish-owned Crooked Creek Recreational Park an additional $20,000 grant each year from the general fund to meet expenses. "When their funds go out we'll close the gates," Ardoin said.

"The only good thing coming out of all of this was that we prevented any pay cuts to the remaining employees," jury President Elden Brunet said.

A proposal to make across-the-board pay cuts instead of layoffs was ruled out, Juror Leland Vidrine said, because some employees are "barely making a living."

He said such salary cuts would be "demoralizing."

Another cost-cutting move approved by the jury was a new policy authorizing only the president, vice president and one member of the Executive Committee to have expenses paid to attend state conventions. All other jurors wishing to attend would have to pay for their food and lodging, while the parish would pay the registration and mileage expenses.

"It's never pleasant to make cuts, but we feel that these measures are in the best interest of Evangeline Parish," Personnel Committee Chairman Freddie Dunn said in recommending the cuts.

In other action, the jury:
• Referred to its Finance Committee a cost-cutting plan involving the consolidation of parish equipment-maintenance yards. Ardoin said the jury could have a $3,200 savings per year by moving the equipment from regions A, B and C to the now-closed parish maintenance facility. The parish is now paying leases to property owners to house the equipment in the three regions.
• Asked Ville Platte police to enforce the handicapped-parking ordinance around the Courthouse parking lot.