Evangeline spillway angers fishermen

By The Associated Press

BAYOU CHICOT, La. — Francis LeBlanc doesn’t mind driving an hour and a half to fish, not if he has a chance to catch some.

But when he can’t catch, he’s ready to leave, even if his stay is shorter than planned. That’s what he did recently at Chicot State Park in northern Evangeline Parish.

He said fishing in Chicot Lake would take more skills than he had. “Right now, I grant you, it’d take a good fisherman,” he said.

LeBlanc and other fishermen blame deteriorating fishing conditions on a $3 million spillway and levee completed last September that lowered the lake’s level.

Fishermen and Evangeline Parish police jurors want the Office of Public Works to raise the level of the spillway, which would allow the lake to retain more water. But state engineers have said there were no plans to modify the structure.

The 200-foot spillway is about twice the length of the previous structure, which had to be replaced because it was cracked and in danger of collapse, officials said.

The 1,640-acre, cypress-dotted lake was a favorite for fishermen before it was drained in 1986 for replacement of the spillway and levee.

Since the new spillway was completed and the lake restocked, however, sportsmen say the longer spillway makes the water level too low and hurts fishing.

Curtis Patterson of the Department of Transportation and Development said the spillway could not be raised the 12 to 18 inches the fishermen suggest without “rebuilding the thing.”

“There’s some differences in opinion there,” Patterson said. “The lake level under the new condition is within about 3 inches of what the old level of the lake was.”

The new pool stage for the lake is 46.2 feet mean sea level. “The 3.2 inches would probably be somewhat detrimental to (fishing),” Patterson said. “Maybe (fishermen) used to have their honey hole that’s not quite a honey hole anymore.”

He said officials in the Office of Public Works design section are “not sure there’s any real need to raise (the spillway).”

James Picayune
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