Fight Over Basin Sparked By House Measure Sunday

National Recreation Area Is Opposed By Resolution

BATON ROUGE — A resolution asking the governor to block any moves for a national recreational area in the Atchafalaya Basin was introduced in the House yesterday, and most observers felt it was the beginning of a lengthy statewide fight over the future of the basin.

Several House members, led by Rep. Esper Marionneaux, Livonia, won House permission to advance the resolution. It followed by several days Gov. McKeithen’s appointment of members to an Atchafalaya Basin Commission to make recommendations on the area’s future.

Charging a “federal takeover” was already in progress, Marionneaux urged that the governor be asked to oppose any type of federal move. A federal recreation area, he said, would bring on federal rather than state regulations on hunting and fishing.

Petroleum Exploration

More importantly, he said, such a recreation area could see the federal government restrict petroleum exploration and development in the oil-rich river basin.

The west side lawmaker won permission to have the matter introduced at the current session under a current rules interpretation more relaxed than when the session started. But he ran into some trouble in asking for immediate adoption.

Rep. Luke LeBlanc, Lafayette, said sportsmen in his area are divided on the question of whether a federal recreation area should be created. He said both sides should have the opportunity of a hearing before a House committee.

Committee Meeting

At his request, the House instead sent the resolution to the Game, Fish and Oysters Committee. Rep. Warren Simon, Kaplan, committee vice chairman, called a meeting of the committee after House adjournment Monday to consider the resolution.

Marionneaux did not object to the committee routing.

Rep. A.O. Rappelet, Galliano, chairman of the commission, was not present when the matter was referred to his committee.

Deeply Involved

Marionneaux told the House that the state as a large property owner and some 1,000 individual land holders are deeply involved in what happens in the Atchafalaya Basin.

He said the area should be turned into a state recreational area because in other states where national recreation areas have been created, federal game and fish regulations have supplanted state ones.

Rep. H.B. DeJean, Opelousas, pointed out that House members have been trying for years to get state action on the basin “without any help from upstairs,” and obvious reference to the governor’s office.

Expresses Disappointment

LeBlanc expressed “disappointment” that the governor hadn’t included any members of the Legislature on the new basin commission. The commission, of which Secretary of State Wade O. Martin Jr. was named chairman, is scheduled to hold its first meeting July 8.

In naming the commission, McKeithen said, “It is of significant importance to the state, the region and the nation that immediate steps be taken to save this last great semi-wilderness area.”