Treen's Basin
Help Sought

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — An environmental organization wants Gov. Dave Treen’s help in efforts to preserve the Atchafalaya Basin from further development.

Treen said later Monday that he had already named a study management group to formulate the state’s program for future use of the basin.

Treen said he wanted the group to be aggressive in indicating the state’s desire to the Army Corps of Engineers.

“In the past,” Treen said, “the state has not been as vigorous in making our position known to the federal government as I believe we should in this case.”

In a two-page letter, Save the Atchafalaya Basin Inc., asked Treen to tell the U.S. Corps of Engineers the state’s positions on flood control, mineral development, environmental management, timber production, public access and existing uses for the basin.

Foster Sanders III, director of the group, said state has until Oct. 28 to submit a plan to the Corps of Engineers, which will draft its own plan for management of the 800,000 acres.

“We ask you now, Governor Treen, to come forward with a plan which protects these important natural systems, and these equally important public rights and resources of the Atchafalaya Basin,” said Sanders’ letter.

At a news conference, Secretary of State Jim Brown said he learned over the weekend that Treen had directed the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism and the Office of Public Works to prepare reports on the state’s interest in the basin.

Property owners in the vast wetlands that stretches some 130 miles from Simmesport to near the Mississippi River to Morgan City on the Gulf and sportmen have been at odds for years over future development of the area.

Sanders’ group wants to keep the 130-mile long area “wet and wild” and halt further development in the basin. The basin is a major drain for the Mississippi River during flood times.

Sanders said it is essential that flood water pass through the area without injury to people or property “which means among other things keeping people and investments out of the floodway in the first place.”

He said it was essential that the state — which owns some 100,000 acres in the basin — take some action to let the federal government know its interests in the area.

Sanders and Brown said it appeared that until very recently, the Treen administration wasn’t going to submit any plans to the Corps of Engineers.

“We’re encouraged that it at least appears they are going to try to do something,” said Sanders. “We have at least seen some encouraging signs.”

He said his group has raised a substantial amount of money to fight for preservation of the basin, but said no action will be taken until after the state has submitted its plan.

The letter told Treen that the basin is a “renewable resource in living things providing jobs, income and leisure activity every day, every year, for ourselves and our children, for all Louisiana for decades to come.”

The corps held public hearings around the state last year on what future use should be made of the basin.

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