Jury wants Chicot Lake water raised

By PAUL KEDINGER
Editor

"We would like to have it restored to its original level," emphasized Police Juror Tommy Thomas to representatives of the Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) and Office of State Parks who appeared before the Evangeline Parish Police Jury Monday night to answer complaints about the level of Chicot Lake.

Thomas' opening remarks set the stage even as Leslie Kent, Jr., chief landscape architect with the Office of State Parks, stepped to the microphone to describe the findings of DOTD engineers and park officials during a June 2 inspection of the lake and a new dam and spillway.

"I grew up there; I know what the water level was before," stressed Thomas, echoing comments which have circulated in this area since the dam was completed last year and the state park lake refilled.

Juryors Thomas and Bill Johnson were joined by other jurors in referring to reports from area residents and fishermen who have based their complaints on water level rings visible on submerged trees, which, they say, prove the lake level is 12 to 18 inches lower.

After almost an hour of discussion, the jury passed a resolution asking the Office of State Parks and DOTD to conduct an engineering study and cost estimate on raising the lake level 12 to 18 inches higher.

After the initial resolution was seconded, jurors agreed to amend the motion so that the resolution would be hand carried to Neil Waggoner of DOTD and Linton Ardoin of the Office of State Parks.

While phrasing the resolution, Jury President Leland Vidrine explained that while the engineers may have designed the new dam to state regulations, area residents want pool stage higher.

Juryor Larry Buller noted, "Pool stage was undesirable before," commenting that residents got use to the high water levels that occurred 80 percent of the time before.

DOTD engineer Bill Fontenot reported the new spillway was only three inches lower than the previous dam, and that the new dam is designed to meet 1981 state regulations. "The structure was built according to plans and specifications," he said.

Fontenot and Kent also contended the wider spillway returns the water level to pool stage quicker than previously.

Pressed by jurors, Fontenot admitted it would not take a great engineering feat to raise the height of the dam, though the effect on drainage and the structure would have to be taken into consideration.

In other business, the jury:
- Agreed to advertise for bids for lease of the concession stand at Crooked Creek Recreation Area;
- Directed a letter of commendation be sent to Wayne Forman, park superintendent, and the staff of Crooked Creek Park for outstanding efforts.

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