New Pamphlet Explains Louisiana's Claims to Tidelands

Outline of Boundaries Title Plea

By JEFF DAVES

A comprehensive study of Louisiana's claims of ownership of the submerged lands in the Gulf of Mexico has been published by the state's attorney general, Jack F. F. Gremlim.

The 44-page booklet, entitled "Louisiana's Tidelands," reviews briefly the case now pending in the United States Supreme Court. A decision on the pleading of the case is scheduled to be argued April 8.

The booklet describes Louisiana's claim of title, dating back to 1803, when La Salle took possession of the country in the name of France. Accompanying the claim is a geographer's map of the sounding of the Continental Shelf in 1786.

La Salle's claim, which was recognized by France, Spain and the United States, includes all the territory north of the 27th parallel. This claim was in force, according to the pamphlet, until 1917.

Included in the booklet are explanations of the historic boundaries of the state, reviews of other land possession cases involving adjacent states, and citations of authority that will be presented to the court if argument in the case is allowed next month.

A foreword by Gov. Earl R. Long and Lt. Gov. Luther E. Frazier is included in the book, which is free.

Credit for assistance in the preparation of the manuscript is given to Gremlim with W. Scott Wilkinson, Shreveport; Marc Dupuy Jr., Marksville; Edward M. Carmanche, Lake Charles; John L. Maddox; Victor A. Schie and James R. Puller, all of Baton Rouge; and Hugh Wilkinson and Morris Wright, both of New Orleans.
of LSU's Institute for Environmental Studies.

In a recent study, Templet and an associate showed that Louisiana has already lost more than $3 billion in land as part of the continuing deterioration of its coast. The loss of its coastal marsh also threatens the future of Louisiana's nation-leading seafood industry.

But Templet and other coastal experts say federal money for wetland protection is going to states whose problems are not near the magnitude of Louisiana's problem.

The National Marine Fisheries Service is funding wetlands projects in places like San Francisco Bay, Long Island Sound, Narragansette Bay and Puget Sound, government records show.

Chesapeake Bay's problems were the subject of a direct Congressional appropriation of $25 million several years ago.

Since then the federal government has pumped "massive amounts of money" into solving the Chesapeake Bay's problems, despite the fact that the bay has neither the problems nor the productivity of Louisiana's coastal estuaries, says Don Boesch, head of Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium.

What the Chesapeake Bay does have is "political clout," says Van Lokip. There are five state's bordering the bay and all are pushing for funds, while Louisiana has only one delegation to fight for funds for the delta's coastal problems.

"Given the magnitude of the problem, we don't feel we've received nearly enough" in federal help, says Joel Lindsey of the state's Coastal Zone Management program.

That's particularly true in light of the importance the Louisiana coast has to the entire nation in terms of fisheries, navigation and oil and gas resources, he says.

He also notes Louisiana's land loss problems have been aggravated by the federal navigation projects and other activities aimed at benefiting the nation as a whole.

Coastal Louisiana and Louisiana's offshore waters have been a major source of revenue for the nation's treasury, and a big part of the state's coastal problems are related to the programs that made that money for the federal government, agrees Boesch.

"We do have to bear a large part of the burden," says Bosch, "because, until now, we have not been active in pushing for federal funds to solve the state's coastal problems.

EPA's Region 6 hasn't shown much interest in estuarine programs, and it's going to take some effort from the Louisiana delegation to get that changed, says David Chambers of the Louisiana Geological Survey.

Part of the problem is that the governor and the state's Congressional delegation have not made solving the state's wetland problems a priority, Templet says.

He feels it needs to be a priority because Louisiana has already lost more than one million acres, an area one-and-one-third of Rhode Island, and the speed with which the coast is deteriorating is accelerating rapidly, now exceeding 60 square miles a year.

That translates to the $3 billion loss figure, which is based on conservative values and doesn't include loss of fish, fur and shellfish productivity or the potential storm damage Louisiana will face, Templet and K. Meyer-Arden of the Department of Geography say in their report on the problem.

To turn that deterioration around, "a relatively small amount" of the sediment that built the delta must be "distributed to the greatest acreage of marsh in a fairly uniform fashion." That sediment is now being dumped into deep Gulf waters because of the extended levees of the Mississippi River.

Among the ways the researchers say this should be accomplished is to use the river's former tributaries, create numerous small structures along the river and implement a phased diversion of half of the Mississippi River's waters into the Atchafalaya River.

The researchers say a combination of subsidence and sea level rise is making the issue of sediment deposition very important because the marshes can't keep up with the relative rise of the water unless sediment is added.

Their research indicates that the even distribution of 7 percent of the Mississippi River's sediment would keep the wetlands even with the relative rise in sea level.

With the loss of the wetlands will go "the nation's largest fisheries yield and other benefits too large to assess at this time," the researchers say.