Crawfishermen in the Atchafalaya Basin, loaded down with a day's catch, speed home through an area that will be dry in November.

Multi-purpose planning required to stop basin's demise, critics say

Third in a series

By BOB ANDERSON
Environmental editor

ATCHAFALAYA BASIN — Three identical silver hulls snake swiftly through a narrow passageway, their white wakes splashing over knobby cypress knees and undulating a mass of water hyacinths. Sacks of delectable “spillway crawfish” are piled in each craft. Tarps protect them from mid-day sun.

Other than the boats, the Atchafalaya Basin seems still in the heat, unlike it is at dawn when birds noisily take flight from roosts to feeding grounds; beavers, otters and minks swim by, sending ripples through the water; and deer slip to the water's edge for a drink.

At numerous landings along the massive levees enclosing the basin, fishermen wait in lines to back trailers down concrete ramps and launch boats to seek some of the 90 species of fish and shellfish found in the basin.

Bird watchers, environmentalists and amateur photographers paddle canoes through a light fog in search of the hundreds of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and plants that make this long basin unique. Laced with bayous, canals and lakes, this vast hardwood swamp is larger than the Okefenokee. In fact, the Atchafalaya Basin is the “nation’s largest forested wetland complex,” according to documents from the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Currently, the water is several feet too high for prime fishing. In recent weeks, it’s been at a productive height for the crawfishermen who set out their black, wire cages to collect the crustaceans.

But in some places, trouble surfaces with the cages.

In areas starting to stagnate as the water level drops and weather warms, crawfishermen are raising their traps to the rotten odor of dead crawfish killed by lack of oxygen.

“It happens every year,” one crawfisherman complains. He and biologists interviewed blame the problem on poor water circulation caused by human attempts to tame the basin with channels and levees. In other spots, sportsmen watch productive lakes, swamp and bayous silt up and change faces.

David Solleau of the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources points the finger angrily at U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' projects. He says the corps has a preoccupation with using the basin exclusively as a floodway to relieve high waters on the Mississippi River while not paying attention to its immense value as fish and wildlife habitat.

As a result, this wonderful wetland is stagnating, silted up and disappearing long before its time, he said.

He also accused the corps of breaking promises to the state and environmentalists and ignoring congressional direction.

“We have one of the best fishing areas in the country,” but it's being ruined, said...
Environmental activists block Alpine highways

Corps projects have changed the face of the waterways in Najadenstein and agitation, and he said.

"Não existe solução para a fome do mundo com recursos limitados," declarou o ativista ambiental.

"E se o mundo continuasse a consumir recursos sem se preocupar com os efeitos colaterais?" perguntou.

"Nós temos que fazer um balanço e considerar o futuro," concluiu.

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The statement also noted the corps ignored the advice of the state and federal agencies to come up with a comprehensive plan for the basin.

Soileau allege that in the years that have elapsed, the corps has made little effort to implement the plan.

The statement also noted the corps had saved taxpayers' money.

"The corps is doing a better management and compliance job," Soileau said.

But once again government documents indicate the corps position had changed.

"Strong protective measures are particularly important since the corps' loss of Louisiana District has had a history of being dedicated to wetland protection," Falkenheiner said.

The Corps has been concerned with the developing areas to clear coastal marsh. The Corps has been concerned with the developing areas to clear coastal marsh.

CLAYTON, New York - A group of fishermen, wildlife officials and others have proposed a plan to create a wildlife management unit in the Atchafalaya Basin. "The rights to retain floodwater, for example, are essential to the basin's productive wetlands," Falkenheiner said. "The Corps says it expects fundswill be available only in the future, not in the creation of management areas."

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