Multi-Use Area Plan Announced

By Jonas Breaux

The Atchafalaya Basin is a vast forested wetland swamp encompassing nearly a half-million acres of south-central Louisiana. This expanse of nature's wilderness is home for at least 300 species of birds, numerous forest animals, species, over 65 species of reptiles and amphibians, sprawling stands of hard-wood timber, and over 90 species of fish, crawfish, crabs, and shrimp.

This great wilderness area is America's largest forested wetland complex and remains relatively untouched in its wet and wild state.

However, in the last 50 years over 21 million acres of wetlands in the Basin have been destroyed by agricultural clearing. What used to be 25 million acres of wetland wilderness has now dwindled to three million acres of woodland, and this acreage continues to be preyed upon by agricultural purposes at the rate of 300,000 acres annually.

After six years of study by federal agencies the U.S. Department of the Interior released last week a plan which would establish the entire Atchafalaya Basin, Fish and Wildlife Multi-Use Area.

"The Great Flood" In 1927 America suffered a triply traumatic natural disaster. Annual snow melt, aided by spring rains caused the Mississippi River and its tributaries to swell and overflow their banks as a result of "The Great Flood." Thousands of Americans were left homeless, their homes and livelihoods whisked down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico with the raging flood waters. In the following year federal legislation was passed which led to the development of the Atchafalaya Basin and Tributaries Project. This project was the first major action by the federal government to control flood waters of the Mississippi River.

Under the authority of the Flood Control Act of 1928, the U.S. Corps of Engineers was instructed to formulate, construct, and operate a single purpose flood control program in the Atchafalaya Basin which would ultimately elevate future disaster flooding conditions due to high waters from the Mississippi River.

Since this time the Corps has been very successful in preventing major flooding. However, due to living and channelization projects implemented by the Corps, what used to be wooded wetlands is now cultivated farmland.

It was the shrinking of the wilderness area which eventually prompted conservationists, environmentalists, and outdoorsmen to approach the Corps in an attempt to prevent further depletion of the Atchafalaya Basin's wetlands.

Congress Acts In 1972 Congress directed the Corps of Engineers in cooperation with state and federal agencies, to review the existing Atchafalaya project and develop a comprehensive plan for the management and preservation of the water and related land resources of the Atchafalaya Basin.

Congress Acts In 1977 Congress directed the Corps of Engineers, in cooperation with state and federal agencies, to review the existing Atchafalaya project and develop a comprehensive plan for the management and preservation of the water and related land resources of the Atchafalaya Basin.

The Multi-Use Plan would be the preservation of the Basin's wetland character and the guarantee of full public enjoyment of its fish, wildlife, and recreational resources. According to a local Department of the Interior spokesman, a series of public hearings will be held on the Atchafalaya Basin Multiuse Concept Plan in 1979. The Multiuse Plan contained a recommendation that easements be acquired to prevent forest clearing, conversion to mono-culture and grazing competition with wildlife to insure historic overflow patterns; and provide for public access for hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation.

Structural measures were recommended to prevent historic overflow patterns and reduce silting in the backswamps.

Multi-Use Area According to the Interior Department's present proposal, the obvious way to facilitate the protection of the Basin's wetlands is to convert it's 432,000 acres of private land to public ownership.

Under the Multi-Use Plan acquisition of the private land would be accomplished by the Department of the Army's U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Establishment of the Atchafalaya Basin, Fish and Wildlife Multi-Use Area would retain the Atchafalaya Basin as we know it for the purpose of flood control, fish and wildlife conservation, and public recreation.

The purchase price of this vast tract of land has been earmarked by the Corps of Engineers at about 87 million dollars. This figure is 10 percent of the cost of the presently authorized flood control plan. According to the Multi-Use Plan mineral rights would be retained by present land owners.

In keeping with the new plan, management of the area acquired would be the responsibility of the Department of the Interior and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

The objectives of the Multi-Use Plan would be the preservation of the Basin's wetland character and the guarantee of full public enjoyment of its fish, wildlife, and recreational resources. According to a local Department of the Interior spokesman, a series of public hearings will be held on the Atchafalaya Basin Multi-Use Concept Plan in 1979. The Multiuse Plan contained a recommendation that easements be acquired to prevent forest clearing, conversion to mono-culture and grazing competition with wildlife to insure historic overflow patterns; and provide for public access for hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation.

Structural measures were recommended to prevent historic overflow patterns and reduce silting in the backswamps.

Multi-Use Area According to the Interior Department's present proposal, the obvious way to facilitate the protection of the Basin's wetlands is to convert it's 432,000 acres of private land to public ownership.

Under the Multi-Use Plan acquisition of the private land would be accomplished by the Department of the Army's U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Establishment of the Atchafalaya Basin, Fish and Wildlife Multi-Use Area would retain the Atchafalaya Basin as we know it for the purpose of flood control, fish and wildlife conservation, and public recreation.

The purchase price of this vast tract of land has been earmarked by the Corps of Engineers at about 87 million dollars. This figure is 10 percent of the cost of the presently authorized flood control plan. According to the Multi-Use Plan mineral rights would be retained by present land owners.

In keeping with the new plan, management of the area acquired would be the responsibility of the Department of the Interior and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.