Plan's Critics Cite Reasons

By ALTON BROUSSARD

The Atchafalaya Basin is not without friends. To attest to that, 32 area residents took their turns before microphones of a U.S. Corps of Engineers public hearing Saturday in Angelle Hall on the USL campus. Their purpose was to let the corps know what they think about tentative plans that will get into permanent plans to save the rich and wild Atchafalaya Basin.

The hearing was the third of five scheduled by the engineers to give everyone interested an opportunity to comment on plans that are important to flood control, preservation of the environment and recreation.

Similar hearings were conducted in Baton Rouge and Morgan City. Others will be held July 30 in Jonesville and July 22 in New Orleans.

Mostly Critics

Saturday's participants consisted mostly of critics of the engineers' plan and Gov. Dave Treen's plan for the basin. Most basin land owners were vigorously opposed to plans calling for expropriation or acquisition of private land for recreational purposes.

Some were highly emotional, others ironical and others almost scholarly.

Col. Thomas A. Sands, district engineer for the corps based in New Orleans, called first on Jessie Guidry of the state Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, representing Gov. Treen.

Not Final

Guidry emphasized that Treen's plan for the basin is not final.

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"The governor is open to negotiation, and the plan of the Louisiana Land Owners Association has not been rejected," he said. Guidry and several other speakers referred to recent advertisements concerning the basin and published by the land owners group. They contend the ads leave the impression that the governor's basin plan calls for a donation of the land by owners.

"We've just been talking," Guidry said. "There's nothing in writing... Gov. Treen is open to all suggestions for improvements to the Atchafalaya Basin."

Tauxzin Speaks

U.S. Rep. Billy Tauzin of the 3rd Louisiana District, said the compromise plan of the land owners makes sense to reasonable people who wish to assure the environmental integrity of the basin and access to its many recreational pleasures.

"A habitat protection easement covering the entire basin, coupled with acquisition by the state of between 80,000 and 90,000 acres through voluntary sales and donations from landowners is a workable solution that should satisfy our environmental concerns and our need to protect private properties from the kind of government tactics that led to revolution in our country more than 200 years ago."

Tauxzin pointed out that the state already owns 280,000-plus acres in the basin. He further promised to do what he can to facilitate the plans at the federal level.

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Basin Plan Criticized

At Corps Hearing Here

Bill Miller, a native of Morgan City, resident of Lafayette and a basin landowner, pointed out that the landowners' compromise seems to be able to bring the varied interests together.

"Having been closely involved in this compromise from its beginning, I am aware of the concessions that the landowners have made and it is my opinion that there will never again be such an opportunity to bring all of the diverse interests in the basin together in a plan that will work for all," Miller said.

Equal Importance

B.E.M. Skerrett III, widely known outdoorsman and conservationist of Lafayette, expressed the sentiments of a number of speakers regarding the engineers' plan to maintain a 70-30 percent ratio of water flowing into the Mississippi and Atchafalaya rivers at Old River.

"While the economic success of agricultural interests in northeast Louisiana may be important, it is of no greater importance than the economic success of our commercial fishermen and crawfishermen whose incomes, I believe, would be adversely affected by a reduction of flow during May, June and July."

James R. Roy, chief of planning for the district engineers, attended the hearing with Col. Roy.

'Bamboozlers'

Wade Burden, a basin landowner, heatedly opposed state acquisition of private property in any of the proposed plans. He referred to "bamboozlers," and said the hearing was unnecessary.

"You're going to do like the communists and they are masters of deceit," he said.

One of several women landowners, Lee Ann Jumonville, could hardly speak when she approached the microphone. Fighting back tears, she spoke against the plan to appropriate land for recreational purposes in the basin.

"There's already 3,417,000 acres now for recreation in Louisiana. Flood control should be your main interest," she told the engineers.