Police Jury OKs advertising proposed crawfish ordinance

By CHRIS FRINK
Advocate correspondent

PLAQUEMINE — The Iberville Parish Police Jury on Tuesday took the first step toward guaranteeing parish crawfishermen unimpeded access to flooded fishing grounds.

Before a crowd of about 50 crawfishermen, the jury unanimously approved advertising a proposed ordinance that would allow "fishing and crawfishing" on any flooded lands in the parish.

"Crawfishermen asked us to pass an ordinance that would allow them to fish on flooded property," juror Kenneth Ourso Jr. said.

The action came after an association of private landowners last month announced a plan to charge commercial fishermen $200 per year to fish on 80,000 acres the group controls in Iberville, Iberia and St. Martin parishes.

Advertising the ordinance is the first step in the process of passing it into law.

After the proposed ordinance is advertised, the jury may hold a public hearing, "if there is a need," Ourso said.

"This ordinance is not aimed at Iberville Parish landowners," he said.

Ourso blamed the ruckus on outsiders. "Out-of-parish property owners are getting people to pay fees in the name of conservation," he said.

Ourso represents a district on the west side of the parish that includes the fishing center of Bayou Sorrel and borders on the bountiful Atchafalaya Basin.

"All we're trying to do is protect the crawfishermen's tradition, while keeping harmony among the different sides and continuing the economic well-being (fishing) brings the parish," he said.

There will be a meeting about the proposal among crawfishermen and state and local officials Friday night at St. Joan of Arc church in Bayou Pigeon, Ourso said.

The proposed ordinance is modeled on one that's been in effect in St. Martin Parish since 1985. Ourso said the jury would alter the St. Martin law by deleting "trapping for fur-bearing animals" from the trespassing exemptions. The exemptions would only be valid during periods of high water, he said.

In other action, the jury:
• Backed away from a committee recommendation that the jury announce its interest in buying the old Sunshine High School property.
• Accepted a $7,910 bid for an emergency repair of a broken sewer line near the Riverview Shopping center.
• Agreed to spend an extra $19,000 on a boat ramp improvement project. The jury will match $19,000 the parish recreation commission will spend to upgrade a $200,000 contract to improve ramps at Bayou Sorrel, Bayou Pigeon and Grand River.