Police Jury seeks end to shell dredging

Acadiana bureau

FRANKLIN — The St. Mary Parish Police Jury Wednesday night joined Iberia and Terrebonne parishes in adopting a resolution calling for an end to shell dredging.

Richard Hayes of New Iberia, president of Save Our Coast Inc., presented the resolution to the jury.

"Coastal Louisiana has been estimated to lose about 40 square miles of coastline a year, and one of the main reasons is because of the destruction of the reefs along our coast," said Hayes.

He told the jury there's a great disparity in the amount of royalty payments the state receives from dredging activities. Hayes claimed Louisiana receives 31 cents per cubic yard of shell dredged while Texas takes in $1.40 per cubic yard.

Hayes said that, with the gradual elimination of Louisiana's reefs, the impact could mean billions of dollars in oil and gas royalties.

The Point Au Fer reefs form a portion of the state's offshore boundaries. Hayes said a loss of those boundaries would also mean a loss of revenue.

He said the reefs are "dredged into oblivion, blessed by the state Department of Natural Resources."

Before the resolution opposing dredging was passed, Juror Everett "Shine" Fouquier told Hayes he would vote in favor of such a resolution, but had his doubts.

By unanimous vote, the jury also adopted a hazardous waste ordinance.

Legal adviser Ed Leonard, after reviewing a Terrebonne Parish ordinance, said the document would provide more than adequate protection for St. Mary.

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The ordinance basically calls for a series of public hearings as well as the right of the Police Jury to refuse to grant permission for any company to establish a hazardous waste dump within the parish.

The ordinance was passed in reaction to recent developments concerning the possible placement of hazardous waste dump sites on land south of the Intracoastal Canal.

According to Harold Scheffler of the Sierra Club, Pakhode Inc. of Holland is planning to buy a large tract of land for establishment of an international hazardous waste dump.

Two weeks ago, Scheffler told the jury the site in St. Mary would be similar to one now located in Calcasieu Parish. The difference would be that the St. Mary location would be able to accept more traffic and accept hazardous waste from foreign countries, primarily Mexico, he said.

The ordinance also provided penalties, although Leonard did not go into detail.

In other action, the jury delayed the parishwide election on the proposed home-rule charter. Leonard had suggested April 30 for the vote.

The April date would have coincided with a runoff election in the Morgan City Council race. Franklin Juror Meg Louviere immediately objected to that date.

There probably will not be runoffs in the western half of the parish, and in Louviere's opinion this would create a low voter turnout.

Louviere then moved that the jury request the St. Mary Parish legislative delegation to obtain permission from the Legislature to have the charter election on July 9.

Morgan City Juror Billy Butler amended Louviere's motion, asking for the original April 30 proposal after much discussion, the jury voted 10-3, with two absent, to kill the April 30 date. By the same tally, the jury voted in favor of the July 9 date.