Port hard-pressed for funds

The town of Delcambre may be small and unimposing. There just aren't a whole lot of people who live there. Many people around the state know Delcambre because of its proximity to the Jefferson Island Salt Mine disaster last November. Others know it for the annual Delcambre Shrimp Festival.

Most people who see Delcambre decide its sleepy little Southern fishing village, its residents hanging on by their thumbs trying to eke out a living from the sea. Well, it's time everyone looked again at Delcambre.

It's not widely known, but the Port of Delcambre is ranked the twenty-fourth leading port nationwide in commercial fisheries.

That means it's ranked right up there with San Francisco, Boston and the Chesapeake Bay ports.

Approximately 3,200 local commercial fishermen depend on the Port of Delcambre to make their living - 1,700 from Vermillion Parish and 1,500 from Iberia Parish.

There are 11 seafood processing plants located in Delcambre. The fishermen, plants and related industries generate a whopping $16 million annually in revenues.

Further statistics indicate at least 425 commercial vessels conduct trade in Delcambre annually.

Further, the Port of Delcambre is a safe harbor for hundreds of other vessels. Anyone travelling through Delcambre when a tropical storm or hurricane is threatening the Louisiana coastline will testify to that.

In fact, the number of commercial fishing vessels using the Delcambre facilities now is phenomenal.

The Port of Delcambre is suffering serious overcrowding of docking facilities as a result not only of the increased activity of fishing vessels but also the increasing demand for port facilities for vessels servicing the oil and gas exploration and production activities in the Gulf and coastal waters.

Add to this burden the influx of Texas shrimpers eager to take advantage of the Louisiana season, and one can begin to see the problem taking shape.

There are serious problems at the Delcambre port. And their problems are going to get more serious.

First, there is no more docking space. Boats moor alongside each other and end up practically blocking the channel.

Since most shrimp vessels are wooden and most oil service vessels are steel, the traffic congestion, wakes from passing boats and other mishaps often result in damaged boats.

Now, the Twin Parish Port Commission, which oversees the Port of Delcambre wants to create additional public docking facilities which can be leased of rented and will reduce the current crowded conditions.

The commission has already been successful in obtaining an option to purchase a 25-acre tract of land near Delcambre and another for a 25-acre tract near Boston. The total cost for the project will be $400,000.

It's a grand idea. Development of the two tracts would relieve congestion on Bayou Carlin, decrease the number of damaged vessels, and offer an enlarged safe harbor area for commercial fishing and oil-related vessels.

The only problem - the Twin Parish Port Commission doesn't have the funds to acquire the property.

They are asking that Governor Treen and the state legislature give financial assistance to enable them to purchase the land.

No one can doubt that the project is needed. There will be more and more oil exploration off the coast of Vermilion Parish. So the number of vessels seeking safe harbor or crew change locations or refueling or simply docking space will increase sharply.

And, with the Texas Closure, and an increasing number of commercial fishermen utilizing the port's facilities, the expansion of docking facilities is crucial.

We'd like to join with the Twin Parish Port Commission in urging Governor Treen and the legislature to fund the $400,000 for port expansion.

Without it, there are going to be more damaged boats, and possibly an even greater number of vessels which cannot find safe harbor when hurricanes threaten.