**GREAT DIVIDE**

"The effect of the pipelines on the Basin has been disastrous," said Dean Wilson, director of the conservation group Atchafalaya Basinkeeper.

Dean Wilson, director of the conservation group Atchafalaya Basinkeeper, talks Jan. 26 about the pipeline infrastructure while walking through the Atchafalaya Basin.

**Proposed pipeline highlights legacy of problems in Atchafalaya Basin**

BY RICHARD BURGESS | thequitterooms.com

Jody Meche, whose family has fished the Atchafalaya Basin for three generations, has no philosophical objection to fossils fuels, no desire to see the oil and gas industry come to a halt.

But when a roomful of environmentalists spoke out at a public hearing last month to protest the proposed Bayou Bridge pipeline, Meche was right there with them, demanding in his thick Cajun accent that any new pipelines not foul the swamp as so many others have done in the past.

The pipeline would run 163 miles across south Louisiana, from Lake Charles through the Atchafalaya Basin to St. James Parish, bridging a gap between the Atchafalaya Basin to St. James Parish, bridging a gap between the Atchafalaya Basin and the need for the state to be a major oil and gas hub in Texas.

Many of the objections raised by environmental groups have focused on possible oil leaks and the need for the state to begin transitioning from oil to renewable energy, but Meche and others like him who make their living pulling crawfish from the Basin have different concerns.

"Crawfishermen for years have complained about pipeline spoil banks — dirt piled up alongside the pipeline route when the trench was dug to lay the pipe. The spoil banks serve as millions of acres stretching across the swamp, blocking the natural flow of water and causing parts of the swamp to stagnate and inapproachable to crawfish and other aquatic life. "The effect of the pipelines on the Basin has been disastrous," said Dean Wilson, director of the conservation group Atchafalaya Basinkeeper.

Meche, Wilson and others — mainly through the Louisiana Crawfish Producers Association — have waged a yearslong battle to force oil and gas pipeline companies to level or break up spoil banks along existing pipelines, with little success.

"See PIPELINE, page 4A"

Boaters more down an east-west pipeline canal Jan. 26, the same corridor that would be used by the proposed Bayou Bridge pipeline, near a warning sign and barrier posts that mark a north-south pipeline in the Atchafalaya Basin.

ADVOCATE STAFF PHOTOS BY LESLIE WESTBROOK

A Cypress tree near a pipeline canal bears water marks Jan. 26 that show the rise and fall of water over time in the Atchafalaya Basin.

**PIPELINE**

Continued from page 1A

"There was no reason for them to have destroyed the Basin the way they did," said Meche, who also serves as a councilman for Henderson, a town on the western edge of the Basin. "They made plenty of money to do that right.

Energy Transfer Partners, one of the main companies behind the proposed pipeline, has pledged to leave behind new and improved canals, which also can disrupt the swamp by rerouting water, and restore the surface to how it was before construction. Indeed, federal law now requires that pipelines in most cases stay on top of violations considered to be "insignificant" and "definitively an option."

Joey Mahmoud, a vice president with Energy Transfer, said in an interview with The Advocate last month that the company will bury the pipeline beneath the swamp floor and restore the surface to how it was before construction. Indeed, federal law now requires that pipelines in most cases stay on top of violations considered to be "insignificant" and "definitively an option."

The pipeline company will bury the pipeline beneath the swamp floor and restore the surface to how it was before construction. Indeed, federal law now requires that pipelines in most cases stay on top of violations considered to be "insignificant" and "definitively an option."

"We are not against oil and gas companies," Corley said. "We just want to make sure it's done right...I want to know exactly what they are going to put in the ground."

As for addressing past pipeline problems, it's a complicated issue. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regulates pipelines in the Basin, but most of the existing pipelines don't fall within the Corps' regulatory oversight because they were built before the Federal Clean Water Act of 1972, said Corps spokesman Ricky Boyer.

Boyer said the Corps investigates reports of improper spoil banks along pipelines that fall under the agency's authority and takes action if necessary, though he added it is challenging for the regulatory staff to stay on top of violations considering the volume of work handled by the New Orleans office, which oversees the Basin.

"From the enforcement standpoint, there is definitely a lack of manpower from the Corps' perspective," Corley said. "I would have to do it anyway," said Mahmoud, who also serves as a councilman for Henderson, a town on the western edge of the Basin. "They made plenty of money to do that right.

Mahmoud said the company cannot alter spoil banks along another company's pipelines.

"We can't go onto somebody's pipeline and move dirt," Mahmoud said. "If it's not our own, we own the right-of-way." Mahmoud said the company cannot alter spoil banks along another company's pipelines.

"We can't go onto somebody's pipeline and move dirt," Mahmoud said. "If it's not our own, we own the right-of-way." Mahmoud said the company cannot alter spoil banks along another company's pipelines.

"We can't go onto somebody's pipeline and move dirt," Mahmoud said. "If it's not our own, we own the right-of-way." Mahmoud said the company cannot alter spoil banks along another company's pipelines.

But Cormier also said he is taking a "trust-but-verify" approach.

"We are not against oil and gas companies," Corley said. "We just want to make sure it's done right...I want to know exactly what they are going to put in the ground."

As for addressing past pipeline problems, it's a complicated issue. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regulates pipelines in the Basin, but most of the existing pipelines don't fall within the Corps' regulatory oversight because they were built before the Federal Clean Water Act of 1972, said Corps spokesman Ricky Boyer.

Boyer said the Corps investigates reports of improper spoil banks along pipelines that fall under the agency's authority and takes action if necessary, though he added it is challenging for the regulatory staff to stay on top of violations considering the volume of work handled by the New Orleans office, which oversees the Basin.

"From the enforcement standpoint, there is definitely a lack of manpower from the Corps' perspective," Corley said. Han she added it is challenging for the regulatory staff to stay on top of violations considering the volume of work handled by the New Orleans office, which oversees the Basin.

"There was no reason for them to have destroyed the Basin the way they did," said Meche, who also serves as a councilman for Henderson, a town on the western edge of the Basin. "They made plenty of money to do that right.

Energy Transfer Partners, one of the main companies behind the proposed pipeline, has pledged to leave behind new and improved canals, which also can disrupt the swamp by rerouting water, and restore the surface to how it was before construction. Indeed, federal law now requires that pipelines in most cases stay on top of violations considered to be "insignificant" and "definitively an option."

Joey Mahmoud, a vice president with Energy Transfer, said in an interview with The Advocate last month that the company will bury the pipeline beneath the swamp floor and restore the surface to how it was before construction. Indeed, federal law now requires that pipelines in most cases stay on top of violations considered to be "insignificant" and "definitively an option."

"We are not against oil and gas companies," Corley said. "We just want to make sure it's done right...I want to know exactly what they are going to put in the ground."

As for addressing past pipeline problems, it's a complicated issue. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regulates pipelines in the Basin, but most of the existing pipelines don't fall within the Corps' regulatory oversight because they were built before the Federal Clean Water Act of 1972, said Corps spokesman Ricky Boyer.

Boyer said the Corps investigates reports of improper spoil banks along pipelines that fall under the agency's authority and takes action if necessary, though he added it is challenging for the regulatory staff to stay on top of violations considering the volume of work handled by the New Orleans office, which oversees the Basin.

"From the enforcement standpoint, there is definitely a lack of manpower from the Corps' perspective," Corley said. Han she added it is challenging for the regulatory staff to stay on top of violations considering the volume of work handled by the New Orleans office, which oversees the Basin.

"There was no reason for them to have destroyed the Basin the way they did," said Meche, who also serves as a councilman for Henderson, a town on the western edge of the Basin. "They made plenty of money to do that right.

Energy Transfer Partners, one of the main companies behind the proposed pipeline, has pledged to leave behind new and improved canals, which also can disrupt the swamp by rerouting water, and restore the surface to how it was before construction. Indeed, federal law now requires that pipelines in most cases stay on top of violations considered to be "insignificant" and "definitively an option."

Joey Mahmoud, a vice president with Energy Transfer, said in an interview with The Advocate last month that the company will bury the pipeline beneath the swamp floor and restore the surface to how it was before construction. Indeed, federal law now requires that pipelines in most cases stay on top of violations considered to be "insignificant" and "definitively an option."

"We are not against oil and gas companies," Corley said. "We just want to make sure it's done right...I want to know exactly what they are going to put in the ground."

As for addressing past pipeline problems, it's a complicated issue. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regulates pipelines in the Basin, but most of the existing pipelines don't fall within the Corps' regulatory oversight because they were built before the Federal Clean Water Act of 1972, said Corps spokesman Ricky Boyer.

Boyer said the Corps investigates reports of improper spoil banks along pipelines that fall under the agency's authority and takes action if necessary, though he added it is challenging for the regulatory staff to stay on top of violations considering the volume of work handled by the New Orleans office, which oversees the Basin.

"From the enforcement standpoint, there is definitely a lack of manpower from the Corps' perspective," Corley said. Han she added it is challenging for the regulatory staff to stay on top of violations considering the volume of work handled by the New Orleans office, which oversees the Basin.

"There was no reason for them to have destroyed the Basin the way they did," said Meche, who also serves as a councilman for Henderson, a town on the western edge of the Basin. "They made plenty of money to do that right.

Energy Transfer Partners, one of the main companies behind the proposed pipeline, has pledged to leave behind new and improved canals, which also can disrupt the swamp by rerouting water, and restore the surface to how it was before construction. Indeed, federal law now requires that pipelines in most cases stay on top of violations considered to be "insignificant" and "definitively an option."