If you care for the Atchafalaya Basin, you’ll love this Realistic Plan

The Corps of Engineers is considering a real estate plan submitted by Governor Treen for the long term use of the Atchafalaya Basin.

The Louisiana Landowners Association supports the governor’s plan on two of the three major issues in the basin — flood control and protection of the habitat against land clearing and development. However, the governor’s plan on the third major issue — public access for recreational purposes by expropriation — is unrealistic and we must oppose it for three major reasons:

1. The plan employs unjustified condemnation of private land. It forces public access for recreational purposes on the property of unwilling owners.
2. Although landowners would retain title to their property under the Treen plan, they would be subject to increased liability for the public use of that property under both state and federal law. They are saying we must let the public use our land and then we must take care of the people who are injured.
3. By forcing owners to give up 300-foot strips of land, called “Greenbelts,” on each side of the principal streams in the basin, the state would, in effect, be controlling access to most of the 445,000 acres of private land in the basin, while compensating the owners for only 23,000 acres.

By turning over 23,000 acres of Greenbelts to the state for public use, the Treen plan would be extremely detrimental to the several hundred private hunting and fishing clubs which have been largely responsible for rebuilding and protecting the game in the basin during the past generation. The management of these clubs, with over 20,000 members, would become chaotic because they would lose control of their leased lands.

The Treen public access plan for the Atchafalaya Basin is unrealistic because it assumes that the federal government will cover all the real estate costs. This assumption is out of step with the Reagan philosophy of federal-state sharing.

Considering the budget mood in Washington these days, Louisiana will be fortunate to obtain the billion dollars needed for the crucial flood control program.

We sincerely doubt that Senators and Representatives in other states will be anxious to put up another $131 million. Louisiana land — especially if that program is bogged down in controversy with owners of the land.

The Louisiana Landowners Association supports an alternative plan called the “Realistic Plan,” because it satisfies all major considerations involved in the basin. It will:

• Provide for the state to acquire 80,000 to 90,000 acres of land through donations and purchases totaling $55 million. These three large tracts, plus several smaller tracts spread throughout the basin, would give the state the amounts and types of public access that it desires for recreational programs. Since the public already has access to 280,000 acres of land and water in the basin, this would open a total up to 370,000 acres of the basin to the public.
• Provide for the federal government to acquire a habitat-protection easement over the entire basin. This easement, which represents a major concession by landowners, would prohibit the conversion of any land from timber to agriculture.
• Preserve the hunting and fishing clubs which have contributed so much to wildlife development in the basin.
• Protect the rights of private landowners by prohibiting seizure of private property through expropriation.

All this can be achieved through the Realistic Plan which has been developed over recent months by landowners, public officials and conservationists working together.

Later this year, the Louisiana Legislature will meet in special session to consider spending $235 million for capital projects. The governor has said that he wants this money in the Enhanced Mineral Trust Fund to be spent primarily on valuable state-wide projects. Considering the attention that has been given the Atchafalaya Basin in recent years, we do not know of any project that better fits the criteria established by the governor for that fund.

Public hearings on various basin plans are scheduled as follows:

TUESDAY, JULY 14, 1 PM Louisiana State University Union Theater, LSU Campus, Baton Rouge
THURSDAY, JULY 16, 1 PM Morgan City Civic Auditorium, Morgan City
SATURDAY, JULY 18, 9:30 AM University of Southwestern Louisiana, Angelle Hall Auditorium, Lafayette
MONDAY, JULY 20, 6 PM Block High School Cafeteria, Jonesville
WEDNESDAY, JULY 22, 9:30 AM The Rivergate, New Orleans

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