Revival of Teche plan said possible

By CONRAD MANLEY

A project to widen and deepen Bayou Teche in the vicinity of and through New Iberia can be revived, according to a U.S. Corps of Engineers official, if adequate local support is forthcoming.

A letter outlining such requirements as rights-of-way and required non-federal contributions for work on the local stream was sent by U.S. Sen. J. Bennett Johnston to Gaston Mestayer, executive secretary of the Greater Iberia Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber, as well as the New Iberia City Council and Iberia Parish Police Jury, had adopted a resolution requesting the Corps of Engineers to halt pending action to deauthorize the dredging project, initiated in 1934, and had asked the junior Louisiana senator for his assistance.

DREDGING of the channel of the Teche was completed from both ends of the 106.5-mile project, leaving only a 21.94-mile segment — from New Iberia to Keystone — unfinished for lack of spoil disposal areas when the project became inactive several years ago.

Col. Alan L. Laubscher, assistant director of civil works, Lower Mississippi and Gulf, of the Corps of Engineers — noting that the Corps had provided the same information in response to an inquiry from Sen. Russell B. Long — outlined the current situation for the Iberia Parish organization.

The Bayou Teche enlargement project, Laubscher explained, was authorized by the River and Harbor Act of June 26, 1934, and subsequent legislation, and consisted of three phases:

(1) FROM ITS mouth to New Iberia, 8 x 80 feet, a distance of 54.5 miles.
(2) From New Iberia to the town of Keystone, 6 x 60 feet, 18 miles.
(3) From Keystone to the town of Arnaudville, 6 x 50 feet, 34 miles, and a lock and dam at Keystone.

"All work on the project has been completed with the exception of channel enlargement between Mile 50.06 and Mile 72.0," Laubscher reported. "This work was not accomplished because local interests did not provide dredged disposal areas within an economical pumping distance of the project.

"SINCE THE unconstructed portion of the project has been authorized for eight years and has not been appropriated funds over the same period, it became eligible for review under the Deauthorization Review Program which was established by Section 12 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1974.

"Review of this project feature was initiated and completed by the New Orleans District in Fiscal Year 1979. At that time, no substantial interest was expressed in continuing authorization of this project."

The Corps official said that the remaining segment of the Bayou Teche project had been included in a listing of projects recommended for deauthorization given recently by the Chief of Engineers to the Secretary of the Army.

AFTER THIS list is passed on to Congress, all projects included automatically become deauthorized after 90 days unless a resolution is adopted by the Committee on Public Works of either the House of Representatives or the Senate to remove a listed project.

However, since interest in reactivating the Bayou Teche project had been expressed by the Cham-

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of Commerce and the
Louisiana Department of Trans-
portation and Development, Of-
fice of Public Works, Laubscher
said, "we are preparing a sup-
plementary recommendation for
deletion of the project from the
Chief of Engineers' current list of
projects recommended for
deauthorization.

"Should this effort result in con-
tinued authorization for this
project work, the work would still
retain its current inactive status."

TO COMPLETE the proposed
widening and deepening of the
Teche along its unfinished 21.94-
mile stretch, the Corps official
said, "action to reclassify the
project to an active status would
be required."

He noted that such action "would
proceed only after a letter or
resolution is received from the
local assuring entities, indicating
support for the project to the ex-
tent that rights-of-way and
required non-federal contributions
will be provided in a manner con-
sistent with our construction
program and available funding."

Also, before any construction ac-
tivities could begin, Laubscher
pointed out, "the engineering and
feasibility and environmental ac-
cceptability of the project would
have to be reestablished in up-to-
date post-authorization planning
studies. Such studies would not be
initiated until funded by
Congress."

IN FORWARDING the Corps of
Engineers' letter, Johnston com-
mented that "it now appears the
project will not be deauthorized;
however, the project will remain
inactive unless a suitable (spoil)
 disposal area can be obtained.

Dailey J. Berard, chairman of the
Chamber's Resources(Logistics Committee, said at
its directors' meeting yesterday
that approximately 200 acres of
land would be required for disposal
of the material to be removed in
widening and deepening the Teche.

He declared, however, that the
project is essential to adequately
serve a projected $41 million
gasohol plant at Morbihan, the
area's sugar refineries, boat-
building and repair facilities on the
Teche and farmers who need the
bayou to move their crops.

Ray E. Esplugas, Chamber
president, agreed, declaring that
"it is now up to the local interests
concerned to move this project for-
ward."