SERIOUS FAULTS FEARED IN BASIN

Unit Studies Atchafalaya Tourism Plan

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By CHARLES LAYTON

Baton Rouge, La. (AP) — Investigators hired by a joint legislative committee on environmental quality are turning up evidence of serious faults in Louisiana’s plan to develop the Atchafalaya Basin for tourism, committee spokesmen say.

The committee is gathering information to determine whether corrective legislation will be needed next year.

For one thing, the committee’s investigators found a 20-foot water level fluctuation in the area where a tourist center is planned. Water marks were found 20 feet up the trunks of trees in the area.

Furthermore, the committee’s lawyers tentatively believe the state will need special permission, probably by act of Congress, to build any permanent structures in a floodway.

The committee, chaired by state Sen. Samuel Nunez of Chalmette, is spending $7,200 for three geoscience students to study soil distribution, drainage and accretion and vegetation in the area of the proposed center.

“We’ve gone in there and done some surveys in that area, and I don’t think they’re going to be able to do it,” said Donald Whittinghill, staff director for the committee, speaking about the tourist center.

The state’s Atchafalaya Basin Development Law, passed at the last regular legislative session, provides for a tourist center, which the law calls an “interpretive center,” to be located in the basin accessible to highway 1-10, encompassing an area of about 1,000 acres. The legislation also authorizes issuance of $7.5 million in bonds to finance the project.

The legislation sets up an Atchafalaya Basin Division within the Department of Public Works, and a 24-member governor’s Atchafalaya Basin Commission.