Teche-Vermilion Project Saved

Acadiana voters in four parishes Tuesday saved a freshwater diversion project that funnels water from the Atchafalaya River into Bayou Teche and the Vermilion River. They voted by a large margin — 51,428 to 21,248 — to renew a 1½ mill tax that generates money to operate and maintain the system.

By parishes, the vote was: 10,553 for and 3,501 against in Iberia; 26,338 for and 12,000 against in Lafayette; 8,265 for and 3,943 against in Vermilion, and 6,252 for and 1,804 against in St. Martin.

Presently under construction by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the project is about one-third complete. It will introduce a flow of fresh water from the Atchafalaya River into the two area streams, Ray Brignac, administrator of the freshwater district, says.

The project is being federally funded for about $25 million on the condition that the local district pay for its operation and maintenance.

Upon its completion, representatives from the four parishes which comprise the Teche-Vermilion Freshwater District will oversee the project.

Voters approved the 1½ mill tax in 1970, but it expires at the end of this year. Every 10 years it must be renewed by voters in a referendum.

The freshwater diversion will make the Vermilion River and Bayou Teche fishable streams once again, Brignac says.

Many agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission endorsed the tax, saying the project will enhance conditions for fish and wildlife.

The diversion also will help to meet heavy demands on south Louisiana’s water supply, said Brignac.

“We are faced with a very serious fresh water problem in south Louisiana today. As Acadiana continues to grow,