Treen avoids comment on ways to obtain Atchafalaya land

By JOAN MCKINNEY
Advocate Washington bureau

WASHINGTON — The federal government won't signal any intent anytime soon to fund his Atchafalaya Basin protection plan, but "there are other ways of accomplishing our objective of holding the landowners to their commitment," Treen said here Friday.

But, when pressed by reporters, Treen declined to say what he meant by different ways to keep the private landowners committed.

He would not comment further when asked if the state Legislature "to up-front" some land acquisition funding on the hope that the federal government would later chip in.

"I'm going to be purposely vague here," Treen said several times.

The governor met with Louisiana reporters after a day of private meetings with top Reagan administration officials, including Interior Secretary James Watt and Army Corps of Engineers official William Gianelli.

Treen also talked about the Basin protection plan at the Office of Management and Budget, which would have to pass judgement on any Basin funding asked for by the Corps or by the Interior Department.

While landowners have pledged to sell holdings — and Treen wants this "willing vendor" arrangement instead of a government land seizure — the landowners also say their commitment is not indefinite; that they must have some concrete sign soon that government at the state and/or federal level will buy their land at their asking price.

Treen also said that the Old River Control Structure improvements, Treen said, was not news, and he is not disappointed.

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The Friday meetings served the purpose of keeping in touch with the right officials.

Treen also said he thought he'd secured agency promises to move the expanded Basin protection plan through the review processes more quickly at both the Corps and then, eventually, at OMB.

While the actual appropriation for federal money to the Basin plan won't happen this year, Treen said he hopes the administration will recommend this year, and Congress will start working on, the basic authorizing legislation.

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Treen re-confirmed what he has said earlier — that President Reagan's fiscal 1984 budget will not seek funding for the new Basin plan. All that can be expected is the continued funding of previously authorized projects in the Basin, such as the Old River Control Structure improvements, Treen said.

This, he said, was not news, and he is not disappointed.

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