Treen proposes plan for Basin buy

By ALLAN PURSNEU
Capitol news bureau

The state is proposing to acquire thousands of acres of Atchafalaya Basin property through a 3-year purchase-payment plan, Gov. Treen said Monday.

He said the proposal was presented in writing to the landowners Monday. Treen said the land deal now involves 51,000 acres, although heretofore only 48,000 acres had been mentioned in the wetland preservation project.

A purchase price somewhere around $55 million has been estimated but Treen said the price is being negotiated. The governor said he envisions the state paying no more than a third of the purchase price with the rest coming from the federal government.

Treen has been trying to get a commitment from the Reagan administration to provide federal funds for the purchase. Treen said there are no funds in the proposed budget the president submitted to Congress Monday for fiscal 1984.

"That doesn't mean that cannot be altered in the legislative process of that budget," Treen said.

Newman Trowbridge, the lawyer representing the landowners, said he expects to study it all this week then meet with the landowners concerning the matter.

"I really think that the situation being what it is, that I'd just as soon not discuss it -- it's delicate timing," said Trowbridge.

"Phased acquisition would permit us ... to utilize any federal support that we can get at that time" for the second and third years, Treen said. A report from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recommends that the federal government provide $32 million for the land purchase.

Treen said the Legislature will be asked to appropriate money for the purchase. The estimated $55 million is supposed to go for the purchase of about 51,000 acres of land in the basin as part of an overall $1 billion plan to preserve the wilderness wetlands.

The governor earlier went to Washington to discuss the matter with Interior Secretary James Watt and other Reagan administration officials.

The governor came away from the Washington visit with little to say to the press at the time about the talks on the

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Atchafalaya.

"I'm going to be purposely vague here," he told reporters at the time.

Treen said at the time that "there are other ways of accomplishing our objective of holding the landowners to their commitment" but he did not elaborate.

Trowbridge said earlier that Treen came away from the meeting in Washington without any prospect of getting federal help on the project until 1985.

The landowners set Monday as the deadline to receive a proposal from the state in writing.

Trowbridge said the original deadline set by the landowners to hear from the governor was December 31, but they extended it to Monday at the governor's request.

"I think that the state is concerned over whether or not it can put $55 million together through state and federal sources to make the purchase," Trowbridge said earlier.

"The major problem has been, while there has been enthusiasm for the project on the federal level, there hasn't been any commitment by the Reagan administration for funds.

"I think the state is trying to formulate a proposal to the landowners which will satisfy them and yet allow the state an escape hatch in event ... the federal funding does not come about. And that's a tricky arrangement to try to come up with." Trowbridge has said.

The question of money for the Atchafalaya deal comes at a time when Treen is facing deficits in the state budget and Reagan is facing huge federal deficits.

The state budget this fiscal year is anticipated to be in somewhere between $50 million and $116 million in the red. The Treen administration has made budget cuts but more are expected unless there is a turnaround in oil prices and the economy.

President Reagan is facing federal budget deficits expected to be somewhere around $200 billion next year.