Treen submits compromise plan for Atchafalaya

BATON ROUGE, La. (UPI) — Gov. Dave Treen has sent to Washington today his proposed compromise for managing Louisiana's massive Atchafalaya Basin — a plan that he said will appease environmentalists and landowners.

The state's plan was released Thursday and was to be discussed by Army Corps of Engineers officials today along with proposals for basin management already filed by the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Louisiana's proposals for managing the 593,000-acre basin, the nation's second largest swamp and the major floodplain for the Mississippi River, call for some federal purchase of Atchafalaya land but maintain most of the area's private ownership.

Treen also appointed a management study group Thursday to develop details of his Atchafalaya plan.

"In the past the state has not been as aggressive in making our position known to the federal government as I believe we should in this case," Treen said. "The study management group has been named to aggressively pursue implementation of a plan that will be in the best interest of the people in the state of Louisiana."

Steve Perry, assistant secretary of the state Culture, Recreation and Tourism Department, said the land use proposal was balanced to meet flood control needs, maintain environmental features of the swamp, protect fish and game habitat, allow continued oil and gas development, maximize public access to the area and maintain "the fundamental rights of property ownership."

"What we are trying to do is (reach a balance) — reach a compromise in the beginning," Perry said. "The feds are going to do something. We can either get in and do something or punt. If we punt, the feds are going to do what they want."

The corps was expected to present to Congress next spring an overall management plan for the swamp that could include a proposal to buy almost all the basin acreage — a plan vehemently opposed by landowners in the area and recreational fishermen and hunters fearing they would lose access to the basin.

The state's plan would allow private citizens to retain title to the 443,000 acres of basin they now own. However, the land would be classified a floodway to prevent development in the area because of the necessity of diverting Mississippi River flood water through the basin during times of high water.

"In order to protect the lives of hundreds of thousands of Louisiana citizens and billions of dollars of property throughout the lower Mississippi River valley, the Atchafalaya Basin must be capable of carrying one-half of an extreme (flood) in the lower Mississippi system," the plan said.

"Development is simply incompatible both with the need for the availability of the basin as a floodway and with the desireability of maintaining the basin in its natural condition as possible desire."

The plan allows landowners to retain "mineral ownership and exploitation" and the right to control public access to the privately owned property.

Treen's plan agreed with EPA statements that cypress and other hardwood treestands in the swamp were endangered and the federal government should buy 50,000 acres of the wooded areas to prevent clear cutting and allow the timber to regenerate.