RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY
LOUISIANA WILD LIFE AND FISHERIES
COMMISSION DURING REGULAR MEETING
HELD MARCH 28, 1961

WHEREAS plans are being made to construct a 9' navigational channel on the Ouachita River through the construction of a series of locks and dams by the U. S. Corps of Engineers;

WHEREAS one lock and dam designated as No. 2 is to be constructed near Jonesville with two sites under consideration, one on Black River downstream from Jonesville and the other above Jonesville and the mouth of Little River;

WHEREAS the U. S. Corps of Engineers states that the project objectives can be accomplished by installing the lock at either location with little or no difference in cost;

WHEREAS the installation of a lock and dam below Jonesville will ultimately destroy Catahoula Lake as a migratory waterfowl area by retarding the run off of water from the lake bed through Little River, thereby drowning out the grasses upon which the ducks depend for a food supply;

WHEREAS this will cause the loss of the most important public hunting area in Louisiana upon which thousands of duck hunters depend for a place to hunt and will detrimentally affect hunting on all nearby waterfowl areas;

WHEREAS this Commission is in the process, at considerable expense, of creating additional public hunting areas but will find it impossible to compensate for the loss of Catahoula Lake as a high quality waterfowl area;

WHEREAS Catahoula Lake and its tributaries is one of the most important commercial and sport fishing areas in Louisiana in its present natural condition;

WHEREAS pollutant materials now come from the Little River watershed pass on through Catahoula Lake and cause a minimum of damage under the present ecological condition, since these materials are not retarded; since said pollutants would be physically detained, by a lock and dam below Jonesville, from enjoying maximum dilution by the natural surface water in that area and, in fact, would concentrate in Catahoula Lake at pool stage; since said concentration would build up to such a degree so as to be detrimental to many fresh water fish species, migratory waterfowl foods, and exert a corrosive action on some metal boats, outboard motors and it is entirely possible that parts of the metal lock structure would be severely damaged;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission in regular meeting on March 28, 1961, that it favors, endorses and supports the location of Lock and Dam No. 2 upstream from Jonesville and the mouth of Little River and opposes its location below Jonesville;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission does hereby go on record as being in favor of locating the lock and dam between the mouth of Little River and the junction of the Tensas and the Ouachita Rivers in order that fisheries resources in the Tensas River may be beneficially affected and partially restored;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this resolution be sent to the Louisiana Congressional Delegation, Louisiana Department of Public Works, the Corps of Engineers U. S. Army and other interested public and private agencies.

This is to certify that the above and foregoing is a true and correct excerpt from the minutes of the meeting of the Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission, held on Tuesday, March 28, 1961.

L. D. Young, JR., Director

Claude “Grits” Gresham

FOR MORE THAN A DECADE, many of our people have successfully fought to preserve the unique values of Catahoula Lake, located in Central Louisiana. Now, despite winning the periodic wars of the past years, the battle may be lost! This vast resource lies on the edge of virtual extinction insofar as hunting and fishing are concerned.

If this catastrophe takes place it will be doubly ironic, for it will be brought about by a project which had no thought of Catahoula Lake in its inception. That project calls for the construction of a nine-foot navigational channel on the Black-Ouachita Rivers by installing a lock and dam in the vicinity of Jonesville.

If this lock and dam is built above Jonesville and above the mouth of Little River, it will have no effect on Catahoula Lake or on its surrounding tributaries. If it is built below Jonesville, it will increase water levels over Catahoula Lake in such a way as to eliminate its usefulness to waterfowl and reduce the productivity of the area for fish, both sport and commercial.

The issue is that simple! It is not complicated! And the above conclusions are those of some of the foremost fish and game authorities in the nation.

"...stable water levels would result in disastrous deterioration of waterfowl habitat in Catahoula Lake. ... The disastrous effects of pollution would be greatly amplified with waters artificially retained in the lake bed," said Albert M. Day, at the time Acting Director of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"Stabilization of water levels to eliminate low water stages would wipe out the vast beds of waterfowl food plants that now are the key to the importance of the area, because these outstanding duck food plants will not germinate or grow in water. With such a change in conditions, the importance of the lake as a truly outstanding waterfowl hunting and wintering area would be lost," said Clarence Cottam, then Assistant to the Director, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

“We are convinced that the changed ecology of Catahoula, resulting from a dam, would prevent a substantial part of the lake bed from becoming annually drained of water will have a very serious effect on both sport and commercial fishing,” added Cottam.

“It is the general consensus of all biological experts who have studied the problem that any dam on Catahoula Lake, which maintains a minimum water level of sufficient elevation to constantly flood a major portion of the lake bed will totally destroy or greatly impair the present high recreational value of the area,” said L. D. Young, Jr., Director, Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission. “Our own technicians have been
studying and working on the Catahoula Lake area for more than a decade.”

At the bottom of the concern of the above men, all highly respected wildlife workers with access to competent research in the field, is the fear that water will be kept on Catahoula Lake at all times. A lock and dam below Jonesville will do just that. It will maintain permanent water over a majority of the Catahoula Lake bed.

Those are the facts!

With such clear cut issues as those outlined above, the course of action should be obvious. Build the lock and dam above Jonesville, preferably between the mouth of Little River and the junction of the Ouachita and Tensas Rivers, and avoid the detrimental effects that are sure to result in event the downstream location is chosen. This would favor fish life in the Tensas watershed and still accomplish the objective of creating a 9-foot channel on the Ouachita River.

The fate of this unique area lies in the hands of the U. S. Corps of Engineers, for that organization will make the decision as to the location of the structure in Black River. Indirectly, however, the fate lies in your hands, for the Corps will presumably be governed in its decision by the will of the people. The Corps has stated that either location is satisfactory to it, and both are equally feasible.

There are people in the project area, however, who are strongly in favor of the downstream location—in favor of permanent water on Catahoula Lake. Most of these are sincere in their beliefs that such a course will contribute immeasurably to Catahoula Lake as a migratory waterfowl habitat, will furnish water for irrigation, improve commercial fishing many-fold, improve the area from a boating standpoint, improve sport fishing greatly, and will attract great sums of money from recreation seekers which will bolster the economy of the entire area.

Although these people are sincere, many are misinformed. With regard to fish and waterfowl benefits, the most competent wildlife technicians in the country disagree with them.

Let’s take a quick look at the intricate complex of land and water south of Jena-Jonesville which comprises the Catahoula Lake project area. Let’s see what it offers now and what it will offer if the lock and dam is built below Jonesville in Black River.

WATERFOWL: Catahoula Lake itself is vital to north Louisiana duck hunting. It is perhaps the most important single area in the entire Mississippi Flyway, particularly for pintails. Clarence Cottam said: “Catahoula Lake is unique. There is no other area like it in the United States. Because of the way nature regulates water levels in this region, the lake provides a vast amount of waterfowl foods and attractive habitat that is used by hundreds of thousands of ducks. The natural water cycle wherein 60 to 65 per cent

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The grasses that grow on the Catahoula Lake bed during the late summer months are used by local people for hay and by waterfowl after winter rains set in and flood out the lake bed with a few inches of water.

During some years as many as 4,000 cattle, such as those in this photo, have been observed on the Catahoula Lake Bed in the late summer after water levels have receded. These same flats are heavily used by waterfowl after being reflooded by winter rains.

The Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission has been responsible for clearing approximately two thousand acres of the Catahoula Lake area. These brush-cleared acres have been wisely converted to lush waterfowl feeding grounds.

of the lake goes dry during late summer provides an ideal environment for the growth of these duck foods.”

Catahoula Lake is by all odds the most important PUBLIC duck hunting area in Louisiana. In addition, the attractiveness of Catahoula to ducks improves duck hunting throughout north Louisiana.

If the lock and dam is placed below Jonesville, you can kiss Catahoula Lake duck hunting goodbye and can expect duck hunting throughout central and north Louisiana to get worse. Several years of permanent water will destroy—forever—the duck food productivity of the lake.

FISHING: The Jena-Jonesville complex provides sport fishing each year that is fantastically good. I doubt that any area in the nation has any better angling. As in all such overflow areas, fishing is seasonal. A permanent water level will not, however, mean twelve months of good fishing each year. Fishing will still be seasonal, but with the difference that the peak periods will be only mediocre instead of excellent.

This area is now one of the most productive commercial fishing areas in Louisiana. Even one of the advocates for higher water levels stated: “. . . . Jonesville has been considered the second largest fresh water fish market in the United States.” Whether it ranks that high or not is immaterial, but it is pertinent that this area provides excellent commercial fishing on both rising and falling waters from late December until August.

All fisheries biologists who have studied this problem have concluded that placing the lock and dam below Jonesville will harm both sport and commercial fishing tremendously.

GRAZING: In late summer, at a time when surrounding pastures are critically short of grass, the dried-up Catahoula Lake bed provides grazing for thousands of cattle and hogs. More than 150,000 bales of hay are removed from the area by farmers living in the vicinity in some years.

Permanent flooding will destroy this part of the resource.

POLLUTION: A tremendous quantity of pollution now enters Catahoula Lake via Little River. A staggering total of more than 174,000 barrels of oil field brine, from the Tullos-Urania oil fields, goes into Catahoula Lake each day. Under present conditions, most of this goes right on through the Lake, into Black River, and then into Red River.

Permanent flooding, according to Kenneth E. Biglane, Chief of the Commission’s Water Pollution Control Division, will result in this brine being spread over the entire lake bed. Being heavier than fresh water, it will sink to the bottom and accumulate year by year. It is probable that the chloride content of the water would soon become great enough to destroy any vegetation which survived permanent flooding, and to make (Continued on Page 22)
the lake unsuitable for either fish or fish food organisms.

BOATING: There are now hundreds of miles of boating waters in this project area. Boating ends on Catahoula Lake, of course, when lake levels are low in the late summer. At low water stages, the parts of the lake still flooded, and some of the surrounding bayous and creeks, become difficult to navigate.

Under permanent flooding there would, of course, be more water for boating, but water levels would continue to fluctuate 15 or 18 feet over Catahoula Lake.

One other argument being used for the downstream location of the lock and dam is that it will enhance the port possibilities of Jonesville. Even with the upstream location, dredging will accomplish the same end, without the detrimental effects of the downstream location. It's a common practice throughout the country.

There we have the alternatives! With the upstream location we keep the great sport and commercial fishing, and the fine duck hunting and waterfowl wintering grounds. We keep the grazing that is important to many people living in the area. We keep the conditions which minimize the effects of existing oil field pollution. We keep the considerable economy of the area which accrues as a result of the fine fishing and hunting.

On the other hand, with the “below Jonesville” location of the lock and dam, we drastically impair or destroy fishing and duck hunting in the Catahoula Lake complex. We destroy the grazing. We create a condition that will multiply many-fold the effects of the present pollution, probably to the eventual extent that no plant or animal life will exist in the lake. We reduce the attractiveness of the area to recreation-seekers, inevitably harming the economy of the Jena-

Catahoula Lake in November and December after winter rains reflood the lake bed. This is ideal waterfowl habitat because large quantities of duck food plants (primarily chufa and wild millet) were produced while the lake bed was largely free of water during the late summer. If Lock and Dam No. 2 is located below Jonesville, the production of these high quality food plants will be virtually eliminated.