

Dear Ms. Wood:

Thank you for your statement before the Mississippi River Commission during our public meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, on April 6, 2001, and the article from the January/February 2001 edition of the "Sierra" publication that focused on the Atchafalaya River Basin.

We share your enthusiasm for the Atchafalaya River Basin and the wonderful resources it has to offer. The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers has spent approximately \$80 million on this project which will help preserve the environment of this great river swamp and make a modest portion of it available to the public. The environmental preservation dovetails with the flood control. Restrictions on development will enhance flood flows and preserve the environmental values for which the basin is so highly treasured.

For your information, details on the elements of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System (ABFS) project are given below:

a. Land Acquisition. The Corps is acquiring 388,000 acres in two forms:

(1) Environmental protection and developmental control easements--338,000 acres. The easements will keep the property in private hands but prevent development as, for example, farms, oil refineries, and residences/camps. Absence of structures will help to pass floodwaters. Logging will be restricted, with the greatest protection for wetland trees such as cypress and tupelo.

(2) Fee land--50,000 acres. This land will have public access.

The ABFS project area is the Lower Atchafalaya Basin. This area encompasses 595,000 acres from U.S. 190 to the Morgan City vicinity. Of this, the Corps is acquiring 65 percent, or 388,000 acres. Contrary to claims that the project will open most of the Basin to tourists and other public users, 56 percent, or 338,000 acres, will remain in private ownership and under the protective easements.

b. Water management units. The Corps is authorized to construct two pilot water management units, Buffalo Cove and Flat Lake. Funds have been appropriated this fiscal year to begin planning the Buffalo Cove water management unit. The units will re-establish water flows for the enhancement of fish and wildlife. Within Buffalo Cove, the Bayou Eugene prototype model was completed in 1996. Planning, engineering and design for the water management units is scheduled to begin in Fiscal Year 2002.

c. Recreation. The recreation features include boat ramps, campgrounds, and a visitor center. The New Orleans District is working on implementation of the Simmesport Boat Launch whose local sponsor in this case is Avoyelles Parish. Plans and specifications are nearly complete. The scheduled award date for the Simmesport Boat Launch is August 2001.

Thank you again for your presentation before the Commission. We appreciate receiving your views and will be pleased to hear from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Edwin J. Arnold, Jr.
Brigadier General, U.S. Army
President Designee, Mississippi
River Commission