

Friends of the Atchafalaya



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<http://www.basinbuddies.org>

<http://www.atchafalaya.info>

May 3, 2010

Debra Credeur, Director
Atchafalaya National Heritage Area
LA Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism
P.O. Box 94291
Baton Rouge, La 70804-9291

Ms. Credeur,

The Friends of the Atchafalaya Board of Directors would like to offer our continued support for the development and operation of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area as an important component of the multi-partner effort to educate the public, conserve the resources, and preserve important aspects of the culture of the various areas known to many as the "Atchafalaya Basin."

The mission of the Friends of the Atchafalaya (FOA) is to promote conservation and awareness of the Atchafalaya Basin. Our vision is a healthy and sustainable environment that supports plant, wildlife and human existence. Our primary goal is to motivate and empower the citizenry to further the cause of conserving Atchafalaya resources.

Our principal approach toward conserving as much of the traditional Atchafalaya Basin as possible is based on partnerships with other organizations with compatible goals.

The FOA works with the Atchafalaya Basin Program to select water management projects through public involvement and scientific analysis. These projects are necessary to undo some of the damage done to this important ecosystem by public and private projects over the past two centuries. Some of these projects failed to adequately address negative impacts while extracting valuable resources and others placed emphasis on protection of outside communities at the expense of the quasi-natural environment.

The FOA has already worked with the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area and the Atchafalaya Trace Commission to educate and inform local residents and visitors about the value of and the challenges facing the various floodways, lakes, streams, swamps, marshes, forests, and agricultural lands that make up the historic Atchafalaya Basin, and the flora and fauna that survive throughout that area. One important vehicle for public outreach is the series of events, known as Experience Atchafalaya Days, which occurs each year throughout October, designated as Atchafalaya Month by the Governor of Louisiana.

The FOA works with other local, State and Federal Agencies and private landowners, on projects that enhance the function, protect the value, and support the rejuvenation of the natural and indigenous components of the Atchafalaya Basin. We also supports efforts that visibly and functionally clean up the waters, forests and adjacent levees and access points around the Basin.

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As part of our outreach efforts, the FOA has designed and now operates an Atchafalaya Basin News site on the internet. That site, accessed as <http://atchafalaya.info>, provides news to citizens about activities of the many organizations active in the area adjacent to, affected by, or affecting the Basin. This site links with the ANHA and ABP sites and with others operated by our other partners. Electronic notification of interested parties has proven more responsive and timely than other means of communication and less taxing on limited natural and organizational resources.

We also strive to promote all compatible activities around the Basin and to recognize individuals and organizations working for the health of the ecosystems and diverse cultural aspects of Basin life and commerce.

The Friends of the Atchafalaya consider the health of the entire historic Atchafalaya Basin area important and dependent on efforts by many organizations to restore a balance among human resource extraction, plant and wildlife regeneration, and sustainable patterns of habitation and recreational use. One path toward improvements in that balance should be the adoption by the Atchafalaya Heritage Area of a goal to improve that balance. Such a goal would address both the environmental and cultural aspects of the Basin and its inhabitants and would involve a sizable commitment to information distribution, public outreach and government partnerships to further the concepts described in the two active proposed alternative approaches for the Management Plan currently under development.

Selection of Alternative "B" or "C" to the exclusion of the other would be an incomplete plan and "no action" is not a useful Alternative. Although the Atchafalaya Basin Program bears primary State responsibility for environmental protection and restoration of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System, additional conservation efforts are needed outside the Atchafalaya Protection Levees, and the ANHA could provide a mechanism for collecting public input and coordinating environmental, recreational and cultural conservation efforts across a wider area than that inside the Floodway.

The members and Board of the FOA look forward to working with the Heritage Area to conserve all of the important resources that comprise the Atchafalaya Basin, in all its interpretations, by all of its constituents.

Regards,

Charles Caillouet, President
Board of Directors
Friends of the Atchafalaya