Michael Saucier

Chief, Natural Resources Management Function

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

CEMVN-OD-T

P.O. Box 60267

New Orleans, LA 70160-0267

Re: Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System Project, Louisiana Master Plan 2012

Dear Mr. Saucier:

Louisiana Wildlife Federation (LWF) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft master plan for The Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System Project. LWF’s membership includes 28 affiliate organizations and 10,000 members. Many of our members are passionate about the Basin and fish and hunt in the area and believe public access is important. Our members also express concern about the long-term health of the system due to current water flow and water quality problems.

LWF’s affiliate organization, Friends of the Atchafalaya, submitted comments to the draft master plan and LWF is in support of that organization’s comments and recommendations addressing specific aspects of the plan.

LWF supports the overall goals of the draft plan and acknowledges its priority use as a floodway. We do want to emphasize the continued need for better water flow management and water quality to improve the health of the system overall to benefit wildlife and fisheries habitat. In this regard, a sense of urgency is well-founded regarding sufficient implementation of the supporting goals of 1) to retain and restore the unique environmental features of the floodway and maintain or enhance the long-range productivity of the wetlands and woodlands, and 2) to maximize public opportunity to observe and utilize the fish and wildlife resources of the floodway.

Periodic flow of freshwater into areas of the Basin is critical to maintaining healthy habitat. The implementation of plans for Water Management Units appears to be either slow or inadequate or incomplete. LWF urges an accelerated pace and greater cooperation with other agencies to expedite these plans or consider a more comprehensive water management plan approach.

We applaud the acquisition of land and environmental easements and encourage more acquisition to increase public access. We respectfully ask for a review of all conservation easements held to assure they are adequate to meet the goals of restoration, environmental enhancement and protection.

While we support recreational use and public access we recommend that the addition of more ATV trails be prudent regarding extent of access into sensitive areas. Also, as more primitive camping sites are created, more bank fishing opportunities should be included for people who want to fish but do not own a boat.

Regarding the numerous old and abandoned oil and gas wells and equipment that are located in some areas within the Basin, LWF urges cooperation with state agency partners to prioritize addressing removal or remediation expeditiously to prevent environmental degradation.

Feral hogs should also be included as a nuisance animal negatively affecting areas of the Basin.

The Basin offers an abundance of bird watching opportunities and is part of an important migratory flyway. There is relatively little mention of enhancing habitat for migratory and wading birds nor of protecting rookeries from other uses and activities during nesting season.

LWF recommends taking advantage of the opportunity to promote a conservation ethic to reduce the incidence of users’ damage. As kiosks, parking lots and access points are added, messages about negative impacts of littering, illegal hunting, over limit hunting and fishing, could be emphasized. Alternatively, positive emphasis and reminders about responsible use might be more appropriate.

The plan is lengthy as would be expected of a document created to manage a system of nearly a million acres of marsh, swamps and bottomland hardwood forests. We understand the complexity of managing the system and stand ready to work with the Corps and other agencies and organizations to enhance the quality of the Atchafalaya Basin for our enjoyment today and preservation for future generations.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Triche

Executive Director