Comments by Friends of the Atchafalaya on:

US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE or Corps) Draft Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System (ABFS) Project, Louisiana Master Plan, June, 2012

NOTES ON COMMENT STYLE

Formatting

Friends of the Atchafalaya Comments, Questions and Recommendations are shown in paragraph boxes to separate them from quoted material.

Master Plan locators are included to make correlation between comments and Plan simpler.

Red notes indicate location in the distributed PDF file and can be used for searching the file.

COMMENTS BY SECTION

Executive Summary

[PDF page 03]

[Comment: This update of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System Master Plan offers a rare occasion to review the effectiveness of past activities in the Floodway, in light of the authorizing flood-control legislation, subsequent environmental legislation and executive orders, the early Corps implementing documents, and the original Master Plan. Based on the directives and commitments in those documents and the current environmental condition of the Floodway, it is clear that additional work needs to be done to identify, justify, and implement solutions which will stop the progressive degradation of and, where possible, restore the health of the multi-use area inside the floodway boundaries.]

[Recommendation: While strides have been made in the Public Access areas, it is clear that the Water Management Units, intended to "restore and preserve unique and environmental values" (Section 12 of this Master Plan), have not been used to full advantage to accomplish that task.] Friends of the Atchafalaya would like to see a higher priority assigned to implementing the Water Management Unit concepts soon enough to still have something to preserve.]

[Recommendation: Friends of the Atchafalaya would like to see more references to "Lessons Learned" during the first decade of operation under the Master Plan. Many suggestions have been submitted and many projects have been studied and some attempted. Surely, we have learned much about what works and what doesn't. This Plan update does not seem to reflect those lessons. Many words are reproduced from the original Plan as if they were new today, when, in fact, they have either been rejected or ignored as concepts, or not funded. While the Corps is not responsible for funding projects, we feel that increased recognition of the dire conditions throughout the Floodway are necessary to raise the visibility of the funding needs.

[Recommendation: It is interesting that, with the dire conditions of water quality throughout the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System, the only uses of the word "urgent" in this revision to the master plan are in regard to the need to build a Project office, improve roads in the Indian Bayou Area, and build a visitor's center near the one now operated by the State on Interstate Highway 10. While these proposals are indeed worthy of attention, the emphasis seems a bit askew of the authorizing and directing documents identified in this Plan. Friends of the Atchafalaya think that the business of stopping and reversing the environmental degradation of largely ignored portions of the Floodway should carry the "urgent" designation.]

Section 1 INTRODUCTION

[PDF page 21]

1.2 Purpose and Scope

[PDF page 22]

[PDF page 23, line 8]

"The Atchafalaya River is the largest of all distributaries of the Mississippi River and as such plays a huge role in efforts to manage the MR&T project. The entire Atchafalaya Basin is located in south-central Louisiana, encompassing approximately 1 million acres, and extends from the confluence of the Mississippi, Red,and Atchafalaya rivers near Simmesport, Louisiana, to the Gulf of Mexico south of Morgan City.

[Recommendation: The terminology in the first two sections of the report is sloppy, with respect to the definitions of the "historic, hydrologic Atchafalaya Basin," the "entire Atchafalaya Basin," the Atchafalaya Basin Louisiana Project, the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System, and the Lower Floodway. To eliminate confusion, we recommend that you apply consistent terminology (e.g., on line 10, replace "entire Atchafalaya Basin with Atchafalaya Basin Louisiana Project, or entire floodway system project"). The use of the term "Atchafalaya Basin" without specific modifiers proliferates ongoing confusion. We will use the term Floodway to refer to the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System.]

[PDF page 23, line 14]

"The predominant factor in the analysis of any part of the ABLP is the requirement of the project to function properly and adequately during major flood events. All other objectives of actions within the ABLP must be subordinate to this goal."

[Comment: Making other objectives within the Atchafalaya Basin Louisiana Project subordinate to the goal of achieving effective flood control should not automatically preclude attempts to achieve secondary goals. To date, funding of efforts to achieve the goals called for in the National Environmental Policy Act, Executive Orders, Federal Legislation, and the Louisiana State Constitution have been woefully inadequate and the condition of a large portion of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System is evidence of that shortfall. Recommendations are included in other sections of this review.]

[PDF page 23, line 27]

"The Lower Atchafalaya Basin Floodway encompasses approximately 838,000 acres, of which about 48 percent is either publicly owned, carries easements, or is state-owned water bottoms."

[PDF page 24, line 2]

"The ABFS encompasses an area of approximately 595,000 acres. It does not include the area of the Lower Atchafalaya River below Morgan City or the Avoca Island area."

[Question: Forty-eight percent of 838,000 is about 402,000. Does that mean that close to 200,000 acres in the Floodway are not covered by any type of easement? Does this mean that the US Government does not hold flowage easements on nearly half of the private land in the floodway?]

[Recommendation: This Section should be revised for clarity. (More comments in Section 3.2)]

[PDF page 25, line 1]

"The ABFS has two mutually supporting goals besides its overarching necessity to ensure that the Lower Atchafalaya Basin can pass a flood as required by the MR&T project. These goals were articulated in the 1982 Feasibility Report:

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.

2) To maximize public opportunity to observe and utilize the fish and wildlife resources of the floodway.

"The public access lands of the ABFS are associated with the environmental goal of maintaining or enhancing productivity of the habitat (i.e., allowing the management of timber for fish and wildlife habitat improvement), as well as preserving existing aesthetic values to benefit the public access user."

[Comment: These words from the 1982 Feasibility Report place the two supporting goals higher in the priority structure of Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System planning than they have shown to be in the first decade of the Master Plan. Taken with the earlier mandate, it suggests that the supporting goals be pursued unless they cannot be achieved without inhibiting the function of passing the "Project Flood." Based on the current condition of the environment in the Floodway, it is clear that the two supporting goals have not been achieved; it is also not clear that the Corps has demonstrated wholehearted attempts to do so. It appears that decisions have been made on the basis of least cost and not on best performance in all three areas.]

[Recommendation: While the Corps does not have control over funding for these areas, Corps recommendations should reflect directives and requirements and highlight areas where funding is inadequate to support those dictates.]

[Comment: The following reference documents provide significant impetus for raising the emphasis on the accomplishment of the two supporting goals described above. The recommendation following the reference documents attempts to address some of these issues.]

[Reference 1 of 3: National Environmental Policy Act of 1969

TITLE I CONGRESSIONAL DECLARATION OF NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Sec. 101 [42 USC § 4331].

(a) The Congress, (...) declares that it is the continuing policy of the Federal Government, in cooperation with State and local governments, and other concerned public and private organizations, to use all practicable means and measures, including financial and technical assistance, in a manner calculated to foster and promote the general welfare, to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony, and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans.

In order to carry out the policy set forth in this Act, it is the continuing responsibility of the Federal Government to use all practicable means, consistent with other essential considerations of national policy, to improve and coordinate Federal plans, functions, programs, and resources (...)]

[Reference 2 of 3: Clean Water Acts of the US Congress through 1987

TITLE 33 - NAVIGATION AND NAVIGABLE WATERS

CHAPTER 26 - WATER POLLUTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

SUBCHAPTER I - RESEARCH AND RELATED PROGRAMS

§ 1251. Congressional declaration of goals and policy

(b) Congressional recognition, preservation, and protection of primary responsibilities and rights of States

It is the policy of the Congress to recognize, preserve, and protect the primary responsibilities and rights of States to prevent, reduce, and eliminate pollution, to plan the development and use (including restoration, preservation, and enhancement) of land and water resources, and to consult with the Administrator in the exercise of his authority under this chapter.]

[Reference 3 of 3: Louisiana Constitution of 1974 (Implemented 1976)

ARTICLE IX. NATURAL RESOURCES

§1. Natural Resources and Environment; Public Policy

Section 1. The natural resources of the state, including air and water, and the healthful, scenic, historic, and esthetic quality of the environment shall be protected, conserved, and replenished insofar as possible and consistent with the health, safety, and welfare of the people.

The legislature shall enact laws to implement this policy.]

[Comment: While Congressional inaction to provide sufficient funding for the achievement of the two supporting goals identified above could be construed as the primary reason for non-compliance with the above documents, Corps recognition of the importance of and emphasis on the achievement of the goals would raise the visibility of these important issues. While review by the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality has not detailed water quality problems in the Lower Floodway, the area is listed in non-attainment for fish and wildlife propagation, and preliminary results of comprehensive testing across the ABFS during the 2011 flood response activities indicate that many areas of the Floodway were effectively isolated from water flow, even at the highest river stages in at least 40 years.]

[Recommendation: Review of water quality data taken during the 2011 flood should be included in "Section 2.1.8 Water Quality" and the resulting conclusions concerning the real water quality issues in the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System should be included in the assumptions, conclusions and recommendations of this Plan.]

1.3 Pertinent Memoranda and Reports

[PDF page 25]

1.3.1 Design Memoranda and Draft Environmental Impact Statement

[PDF page 25]

[PDF page 26, line 9]

"The 1971 agreement [to cease dredging] was followed by Congressional direction in 1972 for USACE to look beyond simple flood control and to develop a plan 'for the management and preservation of the water and related land resources of the Atchafalaya River Basin.'"

[Comment: This directive would seem to require more emphasis on the environmental aspects of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System operation than is apparent in this plan.]

1.3.2 The Feasibility Study and Final EIS

[PDF page 27, line 23]

"The basin as a whole is "drying out" as the result of this massive sedimentation and the fact that the main channel has become more efficient, thereby reducing flows into the backswamps. Sedimentation into the lakes and swamps has raised elevations and resulted in loss of wetland habitat. Arising from this was the desire to manage the water and sediment distribution in the basin."

[Comment: The historic, hydrologic Atchafalaya Basin was a dynamic system before levees were built and the channels were dredged. The accelerated "drying out" of the non-channelized areas is a direct result of the increased efficiency of the main channel and the policy decisions which led to the exclusive use of the main channel and major distributaries as the vehicles for conveyance through the Floodway. An unintended consequence of this policy has been a significant degradation of large areas of the swampland, in direct conflict with the above mentioned directives. Had a more balanced approach been applied to drive water through the back swamps, water quality in those areas would be considerably better and the quality of water exiting the floodway would also be higher because of the filtering effect of the swampland.

Much has been written about the negative effects of sediment introduction along with water into the swamps. It is our contention that the progression of coastal wetlands from marsh, through swamp, to bottomland hardwood forest is a natural one, and that the most important requirement is that the progression produce healthy ecosystems along the way. This cannot be achieved by starving wetlands of oxygen-carrying fresh water. Periodic replenishment and rejuvenation is a required condition for a healthy wetland ecosystem.]

[Recommendation: The Corps, in cooperation with the other Federal and State agencies involved in the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System, should immediately engage in an investigation of the options available to drive more water through the swamps, especially during times when maximum flow is not required through the main channel. The current conditions might be improved by utilizing water introduction from the main channel into traditional channels in the upper reaches of the Lower Floodway (i.e. Alabama Bayou) and by re-opening intentional and unintentional blockages that have been allowed to occur through weak application of permit protections and lax enforcement of permit requirements. Any improvements in water quality across large areas of the Floodway will require an integrated approach across Plan Components, regardless of ownership or responsibility. While these projects might not be inexpensive, the social and environmental costs of losing these unique areas is extremely high, especially in these times of shrinking habitats.]

[PDF page 28, line 35]

"The recommendations of the ABFS Feasibility Study of 1982 may be summarized as follows:

"Flood Control – Implement a flood control system that will safely convey a project design flood to the Gulf of Mexico in an environmentally sound manner. Reduce to the maximum extent practicable the deposition of sediments that reduce the ability of the floodway to support a project flood. Flowage easements on 59,000 acres and developmental control easements on 367,000 acres to be obtained.

"Environmental Protection – Retain and restore the unique environmental features of the floodways and maintain or enhance the long-range productivity of the wetlands and woodlands. In addition to developmental control rights, environmental protection rights are included in a comprehensive, multi-purpose easement on 367,000 acres; two "pilot" water management units (Buffalo Cove and Henderson Lake), with implementation of future units at the discretion of the Chief of Engineers; and miscellaneous canal closures and water circulation improvements."

[Comment: The most important elements of this section to us are to "safely convey a project design flood to the Gulf of Mexico in an environmentally sound manner" and "Retain and restore the unique environmental features of the floodways and maintain or enhance the long-range productivity of the wetlands and woodlands."

We do not see evidence that the original Master Plan or this proposed update will achieve those recommendations? History implies the opposite conclusion.]

[Recommendation: The "pilot" water management projects have not, to date, shown positive, sustained results and will obviously require more continuous resources if better results are to be expected. That observation of reality should be stated in this update and "Lessons Learned" enumerated so that future attempts are likely to be more successful.]

1.3.7 Environmental Assessment, Public Access Land Improvements

[PDF page 34, line 26]

"In 2002 MVN completed an Environmental Assessment (EA), Public Access Land Improvements, Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System, St. Landry, St. Martin, and Iberville Parishes, Louisiana (EA #345)."

[PDF page 34, line 43]

"Several actions proposed have since been completed for the BDOA and IBA, as discussed in Sections 7 and 8.

[Comment: Actions in Bayou Des Ourses Area and Indian Bayou Area have had positive effects on those areas of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System.]

[Recommendation: Additional water management efforts, especially in Bayou Des Ourses Area and the adjoining State, Federal, and Easement lands could also help the areas farther south in the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System. The authorized Big Alabama diversion structure on the Sherburne Complex (referenced on page 37) is one project that should be emphasized.]

1.3.8 Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

[PDF page 35, line 2]

"In 2005 the USACE initiated a Supplemental EIS (SEIS) for three features of the ABFS. The SEIS is in support of implementing construction and operation of the Henderson Lake Water Management Unit (WMU) in St. Martin and St. Landry parishes, which is one of two authorized pilot management units for the Management Unit feature of the ABFS project; the freshwater distribution structure element, of the Henderson Lake Area, ABL project in St. Martin and St. Landry parishes; and the Recreational Development feature of the ABFS project in St. Martin, Iberia, St. Mary, Iberville, St. Landry, and Pointe Coupee parishes. Following consultation with various governmental agencies, public scoping meetings, and development of alternative plans of action, the draft planning and SEIS report is scheduled for public release later in 2012."

[Comment: We are hopeful that the large public land holdings in the Henderson Lake Water Management Unit will make significant improvements in water quality more achievable than in other areas of the Floodway that suffer from fragmented ownership.]

[Recommendation: The Henderson Lake Unit is one with significant mercury contamination problems that need to be addressed with the appropriate responsible agencies. The LA Department of Natural Resources Office of Conservation has identified the location of many of the gas flow meters that caused much of the contamination. The US Environmental Protection Agency and LA Department of Environmental Quality are responsible for mercury problems and the US Coast Guard supervises water cleanup operations. The 2011 Flood Response effort identified the advantages of utilizing the capabilities of the various agencies working in the Floodway and this problem represents an ideal opportunity for exercising a systematic, multi-agency approach to situations like this one. Because the US Army has extensive experience addressing contamination issues and, given the New Orleans District responsibilities in the Floodway, the Corps seems especially appropriate to lead this effort.]

1.3.8.1 Management Units and Diversion Structures

[PDF page 37, line 37]

"The Sherburne freshwater diversion structure at Big Alabama Bayou was authorized by WRDA of 1986 in accordance with the plan recommended in the 1982 Feasibility Study. The plan included construction of freshwater distribution structures from the Atchafalaya River to provide water inflow into the Alabama Bayou area. To date, no funds have been allocated to this effort by USACE, and this project remains in the planning stage. USACE is evaluating appropriate funding mechanisms that may be utilized for this project."

[Comment: Friends of the Atchafalaya strongly support the concept of freshwater introduction into the Alabama Bayou Area and the restoration of some water flow across artificial boundaries in and below that area, with the goal of restoring flow through traditional natural streams in the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System. We believe that such efforts can yield significant improvements in water quality on the East side of the Floodway.]

1.3.9 East Grand Lake Study

[PDF page 38, line 29]

"A supplemental study to the Channel Training Above Morgan City Design Memorandum is being conducted to determine how to ameliorate water quality and circulation problems induced by the channel training works. The study encompasses the area between the Atchafalaya Basin Main Channel and the East Atchafalaya Basin Protection Levee, south of Bayou Sorrel, and north of Flat Lake."

[Comment: The apparent lack of progress on the East Grand Lake Study is not reassuring in the context of overall low priorities for dealing with the negative effects on water quality in the swamps that have been caused by "channel training".]

[Recommendation: This study should be completed and resulting solutions should be implemented.]

1.3.11 ABFS Louisiana, Lower Atchafalaya Basin Reevaluation Study

[PDF page 39, line 15]

"The purpose of the Lower Atchafalaya Basin Reevaluation (LABR) study is to reevaluate the features of the 1982 Feasibility Study and, where necessary, develop plans that provide for the ABLP to continue to carry out its system function as part of the overall MR&T project in a manner that is consistent with the National objectives of economic development and environmental stewardship."

[Comment: This study was initiated in 1994, contracted in 1999, and is still not complete in 2012. This is another indication that there is no priority placed on dealing with the environmental problems of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System.]

[Recommendation: A Lower Atchafalaya Basin Reevaluation Study seems like the closest project that has been proposed to a comprehensive Water Management Plan. An system-wide approach would offer guidance for making decisions in all the Water Management Units and across all land classifications so that a unified approach could possibly ensue.]

1.4 Updated Master Plan Aproval and Future Documents

[PDF page 40]

1.4.2 Future Documents

[PDF page 41, line 34]

"The only features eligible for PPA negotiation at this time are the public access, flood control (flowage and developmental control easements), and environmental (environmental protection easements) features."

[Comment: Apparently, there is no money currently available for anything other than Flood Control, Easements, and Public Access. No mention is noted of the necessity for environmental restoration (Water Management Units), or enforcement of existing controls.]

1.4.2.3 Other Needed Documents/Plans

[PDF page 42, line 36]

[Comment: It is likely that surveys of environmentally sensitive, culturally important, and aesthetically significant areas are required as part of the responsibility to protect such areas. Destruction of the environmentally sensitive swamp areas by neglect and removal of water resources by channel training and other tools should not be accepted on the basis of lack of program activity in those areas. This approach ignores the fact that the Corps is directed through enabling legislation to protect the environment while addressing flood control issues.]

[Recommendation: Comprehensive surveys of the entire Floodway should be addressed in the pending Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.]

[Recommendation: This is an area where a "Lessons Learned" review would be useful in setting a more productive course for future operations in the Floodway.]

Section 2 RESOURCES OF THE ABFS PROJECT AREA

[PDF page 47]

[Comment: There does not appear to be a reference in this Section to Aesthetic Resources. The National Environmental Policy Act specifically requires that Federal agencies "assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings." This would seem to suggest that aesthetic resources should, at the very least, be inventoried and addressed in all planning and decision documents related to the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System.]

2.1 Natural and Cultural Resources

2.1.2 Hydrology, Geomorphology, Geology, and Minerals

[PDF page 47, line 20]

"The historic, hydrologic Atchafalaya Basin is a 3,000-square-mile basin, located in south-central Louisiana. The natural basin lies between the Mississippi and Lafourche Ridges on the east and the Teche Ridge on the west. The northern and southern boundaries are Old River, at the junction of the Red and Mississippi rivers and the Gulf of Mexico."

[3,000 square miles = 1.92 million acres]

[Comment: This historic fact, along with multi-agency observations, supports the contention that the creation of the Atchafalaya Basin floodway systems has not only degraded the environmental quality of areas inside the levees, but has also negatively affected areas surrounding the Floodway. The closing of waterways by levees greatly affected drainage and sedimentation issues of surrounding water bodies. Examples include Lake Fausse Pointe and Lake Verret, which have both been studied by the New Orleans District in cooperation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the LA Atchafalaya Basin Program.]

[Recommendation: A Federal means is needed for addressing water quality and sedimentation problems in the historic, hydrologic Atchafalaya Basin areas lying east and west of the levees (e.g., Lake Fausse Pointe and the Lake Verret watershed,) regardless of current Mississippi River and Tributaries Program boundaries. These areas have been significantly affected by by the construction of the isolated floodway systems and by Federal land "conservation" practices of the past.]

2.1.4 Waters and Wetlands

[PDF page 51, line 30]

"Construction of flood protection works, navigation features, and access for the oil/gas industry in the Atchafalaya Basin have altered the hydrology of the natural system (Gagliano and van Beek, 1975)."

[PDF page 52, line 17]

"It is also understood that the stagnant deoxygenated water adversely affects fisheries, timber, and wildlife."

[PDF page 53, line 1]

"The fish and wildlife resources of the ABLP historically have been diverse and abundant, due to the variety and quality of available aquatic habitats."

[PDF page 54, line 7]

"Backwater lakes (e.g., Cow Island and Lost Lake, Henderson Lake, and Buffalo Cove Lake) receive a flow-through flushing by river waters only during the highest flood stages during much of the year."

[Comment: The conditions described in the first quoted line above, in addition to railroad and highway construction, have created the situation described in the second quote above to deplete the resources described in the third quote. The conditions identified in the 2011 Flood data show that many areas, especially in the eastern part of the Floodway are not getting flushed out, even during the extreme high stages of flood events that typically occur less than every 20 years. These conditions are not supportive of the contention in the following section.]

2.1.5 Vegetation

[PDF Page 55]

2.1.5.2 Forested Wetlands (Bottomland Hardwoods and Baldcypress-Tupelo Gum Swamps)

[PDF Page 57]

[PDF Page 57, line 3]

"Alteration of natural hydrological and flooding regimes has significantly disturbed forested wetlands in the ABLP.

[PDF Page 57, line 13]

"The area south of I-10 (latitude of Ramah and Henderson) was dominated equally by willow and baldcypress in the 1930s. Since then, sedimentation has induced an overall trend to large increases of willow, bottomland hardwoods, and human development, while the mature baldcypress-tupelo gum swamp area has decreased by more than 80 percent.

[PDF Page 57, line 24]

"Poor timber management has resulted in the decline of hard mast- producing species and is expected to continue.

[PDF Page 57, line 41]

"Of the variety of processes to which developmental trends of vegetation types respond over time, hydrologic regime is the primary controlling factor in the ABLP. Baldcypress-tupelo gum swamps, for example, require the presence of floodwaters throughout the growing season on average 3 out of every 5 years. In contrast, if these swamps are maintained flood-free during the growing season for 3 out of every 5 years, a mixed baldcypress- bottomland hardwoods association develops. Red maple and green ash will become abundant; if flooding is accompanied by excessive sedimentation however, willow and cottonwood will predominate. Baldcypress logging in areas with reduced flood regimes, lowered water tables, or sedimentation tends to convert swamps to bottomland hardwoods. With increased water levels, in contrast, baldcypress logging results in conversion to tupelo, marsh, or open water."

[Comment: Forestry specialists consulted by Friends of the Atchafalaya suggest that the lack of bald cypress regeneration is primarily caused by permanent flooding in many area since levee construction. Trees are getting larger, hence there is more VOLUME of cypress-tupelo, but no new stems. Thus, it APPEARS that the forest is productive. Further, no harvest to speak of has or is occurring.

Trees do not reproduce under water. Impoundments made by canal formation have created mini-basins that are completely devoid of new seedlings. Only recently have embankment cuts been made to allow water movement in and out of some of these impoundments. Natural causes, including insects, diseases, lightning, hurricanes, etc have depleted the mature overstory. Nutria further predate any potential natural or manmade seedling development.

"Poor forest management" should actually be "NO forest management'". Since the massive clear-cutting in the early 20th century, there have been few areas that now produce trees large enough to justify harvest. Thus, with no economic return, there is no reason to "manage". Any tree removed cannot feasibly be replaced, especially in deep, impounded water. Canal spoil banks and areas with significant sedimentation become seed banks for willow, maple, green ash, Chinese tallow and other bottomland species.

Trees are now approaching 100 years of age following clear-cutting, and some harvest has been conducted with disastrous localized changes in tree species as noted in the draft report. Corps regulations restrict proper forest management and harvest, further hindering any bald cypress regeneration efforts. With no "new" trees, there will be the declines noted in the draft.

There seems to be no silver bullet with regard to how to derail the present trends in bald cypress losses, or to reverse them. The task force charged with this issue during Governor Blanco's regime addressed some of these issues, but due to opposing viewpoints on preserving cypress (NO harvesting versus landowners rights to harvest), no consensus was ever reached.

Recommendation: US Army Corps of Engineers is neither equipped nor funded to manage forests (or usage conflicts.) Scientists from US Forest Service, LA Department of Agriculture and Forestry, LA State University, Southeastern LA University, US Geological Survey National Wetlands Research Center and other appropriate agencies might be better equipped to help with this issue and the Corps should involve them in developing an overall forest management process.]

[Recommendation: Steps should be taken to eliminate unlawful or restricted extraction of existing bald cypress trees from controlled areas of the Floodway, and to increase the acreage of protected bald cypress forest through purchase of fee title or environmental protection easements, as appropriate.]

2.1.6 Wildlife Resources

[PDF page 58]

2.1.6.2 Birds

[PDF page 59]

[PDF page 59, line 26]

"The ABLP is an important wintering area for waterfowl in the Mississippi Flyway."

[Comment: Areas of the Atchafalaya Basin, Louisiana Project have been designated as Important Bird Areas by BirdLife International. The National Audubon Society is the US Partner of the Important Bird Area Program. Friends of the Atchafalaya is a strong supporter of the Important Bird Area Program.]

[Recommendation: The US Army Corps of Engineers should be in contact with the Louisiana office of the National Audubon Society (6160 Perkins Road, Baton Rouge, LA, 70808) for information on sensitive bird locations associated with the designated Areas.

2.1.8 Water Quality

[PDF page 65, line 24]

"Water quality in the Atchafalaya River Basin and Main Channel and its distributaries is generally good."

[Comment: This statement is misleading and incomplete. This is an example of confusing terminology referred to in earlier comments. What is the "Atchafalaya River Basin" in this context? The statement implies that the overall water quality of the Floodway is not impaired. While the water quality in the Main Channel and the major distributaries might be generally good, the water in the areas between those channels is documented as not so.

The included table (Table 2-1 on page 66, line 22) continues the charade by suggesting that the impairments in the Lower Floodway are "Mercury in fish tissue" caused by "Atmosphere deposition." The source is given as "LDEQ 2011 Final 2010 Louisiana Water Quality Integrated Report – Category 5 and 5RC 303 (d) list."

In fact, the 2010 and 2011 versions of the Louisiana Water Quality Inventory: Integrated Report, Fulfilling Requirements of the Federal Clean Water Act, Sections 305(b) AND 303(d), Appendix A - Assessments, page A-3 (same page, both years) lists the "Lower Atchafalaya Basin Floodway-From Whiskey Bay Pilot Channel at mile 54 to US-90 bridge in Morgan City; includes Grand Lake and Six-Mile Lake" as not supporting fish and wildlife propagation because of low dissolved oxygen from unknown sources. We believe that this is a natural result of intentional reduction of water flow into swamp areas by channel training activities. The same page in both yearly reports lists the water bodies as not supporting primary contact recreation activities because of high fecal coliform levels from natural sources. We believe that this is another indication of poor water flow in the same areas.]

[Recommendation: US Army Corps of Engineers should review the environmental conditions in the entire Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System, using available water quality data from the several Federal and State agencies that collect such data, with special emphasis on review of 2011 flood data, which appears to indicate that widely held assumptions about water flow in the now-isolated swamp areas were overly optimistic. Based on said review, the Corps should embark on an accelerated program to restore historic water patterns, wherever possible, and to remove barriers to State agencies that are attempting to reverse the environmental damage caused by historic water management policies in the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System.]

2.1.9 Cultural Resources

[PDF page 66, line 27]

[Comment: It is troubling that a discussion of the cultural resources of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System would not include references to the existence or informational resources of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area, authorized by the same Congress that authorizes the Corps and the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System. Indeed, the only mention of the Heritage Area in this document is in Section 4.3 Constraints Affecting ABFS Project Lands.]

[Recommendation: Closer cooperation with the Heritage Area and use of Area information resources might provide supplemental cultural resource information that could supplement scarce funding input for the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System.]

2.1.9.2 Historic

[PDF Page 68]

[PDF Page 69, line 6]

"During the Antebellum period (circa 1803 to 1860), some portions of the Atchafalaya Basin experienced significant settlement. [...] This period of agriculture-based expansion was short-lived. Increased flooding forced the abandonment of these newly cleared areas. Those who remained in the Atchafalaya Basin, most notably in the Bayou Chene community, were forced to adapt from a farm-based economy to extractive pursuits."

[PDF Page 69, line 35]

"The construction of the ABLP following the disastrous flood of 1927 resulted in the residential abandonment of the heart of the Basin over the next couple of decades. Atchafalaya Basin residents moved outward either to communities on the edges of the ABLP or beyond."

[Comment: The Bayou Chene community - the subject of written documentation by the Corps (http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/pdf/abt_bayouchene.pdf) - is a good example of a significant cultural resource that should be identified in any inventory of such resources in the floodways, but it is far from the only one. Others include the town of Atchafalaya, and Hog Island, the area from which came many of the families that eventually settled at Myette (Millet) Point. It was recently decided that oral histories of many inhabitants from the Hog Island area and Myette (Millet) Point will be housed in the Library of Congress and so represent an important cultural resource from the Floodway.

The period from 1860 through the construction of the Floodway deserves special attention. It was marked by the development of one of the most important inland fisheries in North America, a huge timber industry, a cross-basin rail road system, a series of watercraft innovations, and other notable accomplishments. Bayou Chene is perhaps "most notable," but it was one location within a system of important places.]

[Recommendation: Only a comprehensive inventory by qualified professionals will surface such sites in time for them to be investigated before being lost or overlooked in the rush to plan and execute a worthy project.]

2.2 Social Resources

[PDF page 69]

[Comment: While it is difficult to gather demographics on the people inside the levees, it is important to know more about those people. They were there before the floodway and many work inside the levees. Most of the information here refers to people outside the Floodway, and much is useful in terms of re-creation demand; however, the lack of economic and social information specific to the people inside the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System would seem to be an important omission.]

[Question: Is there not specific information on the number of people likely to be affected by floodway operation?]

[Recommendation: Parish Clerks of Court and Sheriff departments should be able to provide more accurate information on inhabitants inside the Atchafalaya Basin Louisiana Project.]

Section 3 DESCRIPTION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE ABFS

[PDF page 111]

3.1 Authorization

[PDF page 111]

3.1.2 Other Applicable Laws and Regulations

[PDF page 112]

[PDF page 113, line 4]

"PL 89-665

"The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, sets forth the basic policy for preservation of the national heritage. It provides for an expanded National Register of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant to the American heritage, and establishes procedures for their identification, acquisition, and preservation."

[Comment: A comprehensive survey of heritage resources in the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System might be feasible through cooperation with the other Federal Agencies involved in heritage documentation and preservation including but not limited to the National Park Service, the Library of Congress, LA Department of Culture Recreation and Tourism, and the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area.]

[Recommendation: The Corps should work closely with other agencies to develop a comprehensive heritage and cultural resource inventory before it is required for specific project activities. Such data would also be useful when reviewing applications for permit activity in the Floodway.]

3.2 ABFS Project Lands

[PDF page 119]

"As currently authorized, the ABFS consists of [...] the flood control feature (the acquisition of flowage easements, over 59,000 acres of privately owned lands, and of developmental control easements over 338,000 acres, which include the 59,000 acres of flowage easements)..."

[Question: How is flood control possible if flowage easements exist on only 59,000 acres of the Floodway?]

3.3 Project Operations

[PDF page 121]

"The ABFS OM is responsible for the overall management of the natural resource features of the project, including the public access feature, environmental easements, developmental control easements, and, when implemented, the recreation and visitor center features. The OM's management objectives and strategies are conducted by field personnel based in the ABFS Project Office (PO), currently located in Port Barre, Louisiana."

[Question: Is it possible to combine routine wetland permit enforcement with Project Operations to achieve better oversight of permittee actions that affect water quality and habitat alteration or degradation?]

3.3.4 Project Operations of the Lands Acquired for the Flood Control and Environmental Protection Features of the ABFS

[PDF page 128, line 42]

"To assess compliance with the easements acquired for the USACE's ABFS Master Plan, USACE employees will conduct inspections."

[Question: Is there a schedule for periodic inspections of easement areas? Is this coordinated with maintenance of permitted uses in the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System?]

[Recommendation: Routine inspections throughout the Floodway should be performed to verify acceptable and legal uses of land according to this Plan, Easement conditions, and all other Corps-issued permits for activity inside the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System.]

[PDF page 129, line 1]

"The most critical part of the management of USACE easement provisions of the ABFS is to inform the landowners and their tenants, licensees, permittees, and assigns of their responsibilities under the easement guidelines, and then to place these tracts on an inspection cycle in order to assess compliance."

[Comment: Friends of the Atchafalaya wholeheartedly supports actions by the Corps to improve compliance with all permits and easement conditions. We feel that fragmentation between Corps departments negatively affects enforcement of permit and easement violations.]

[PDF page 129, line 21]

" It is anticipated that the non-Federal sponsor will perform periodic aerial inspections of all easement areas to determine if any timber harvesting is being conducted and to identify any new construction sites. It is also anticipated the non-Federal sponsor will conduct title searches in local courthouses to identify timber-harvesting deeds. When the non-Federal sponsor identifies a timber harvesting site or new construction site or obtains a copy of a timber deed or similar document, the non-Federal sponsor will advise the PO, and will provide that office with all available information. The non-Federal sponsor may assist the PO with inspections and landowner meetings."

[Comment: This section seems to imply that State and local agencies should be responsible for identifying violations of Federal laws and agreements. We support enforcement in the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System from whichever agency is deemed responsible.]

3.3.5 Project Operations of the Water Management Units, Canal Closures and Water Circulation Improvements

[PDF page 130]

"Implementation of WMU feature is intended to compensate for adverse impacts on Atchafalaya Basin aquatic habitats resulting from flood control and navigation, such as the channel training works on the Atchafalaya Basin main channel and the East and West Protection Levees. Natural processes and human activities have combined to produce 13 hydrologically distinct areas in the ABFS, where water regimes could be managed to mimic historical water overflow patterns to improve water circulation. Originally, the kinds of improvements anticipated would include the dredging of inlet and outlet channels or construction of new ones; constructing low levees or dikes around the units; installing weirs in inlet and outlet channels to control flows; and closing certain bayous and canals. Retaining water within the units by these means, however, could exacerbate stagnation and water circulation problems. Therefore, management unit goals are now redefined as restoration of historic north-to-south flows to the greatest extent practicable, while managing or redirecting sedimentation for the purpose of improving water quality and circulation within the units."

[Comment: The slow and ineffective implementation of Water Management Units and lack of emphasis on achieving the above goals, compared to the flood control efforts which have caused the problems, has contributed to the dire environmental challenges that we now find in large areas of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System between the main channels and distributaries.]

[Recommendation: We feel that it is the responsibility of the Corps to identify the past shortcomings of planning and funding of Water Management Units and to raise the visibility of those needs because those units are the primary tool available for the required environmental restoration of degraded floodway ecosystems. We would like the Corps to recognize the need for an overall water management plan, rather than focusing on fragmented pilot unit solutions. This is a case where a "Lessons Learned" document would be appropriate.]

Section 4 - FACTORS INFLUENCING AND CONSTRAINING RESOURCE USE, DEVELOPMENT, AND MANAGEMENT

[PDF page 135]

4.2 ABFS Project, Feature Constraints

[PDF page 137]

4.2.1 WMUs

[PDF page 137, line 20]

"Water management units are somewhat experimental, with high implementation costs and unknown results."

[Comment: As discussed elsewhere in this report, the Water Management Units are the primary mechanism for addressing the environmental problems caused by Channel Training, yet this discussion focuses on the reasons why the Units cannot be implemented to a much greater extent than does any other portion of the plan discuss the importance of that implementation.]

[Recommendation: Appropriate emphasis should be placed on the importance of implementing effective Water Management Unit planning in order to meet the requirements placed on the Corps by the above mentioned directives.]

4.3 Constraints Affecting ABFS Project Lands

[PDF page 143]

4.3.1 Cultural Resources

[PDF page 144, line 12]

"There is a lack of comprehensive cultural resources surveys of the lands acquired by easement, and easement lands may contain sites that should be considered when destructive activities are proposed. A monitoring and permit review process has been established to ensure that significant cultural resources are not destroyed by Federally approved actions."

[Recommendation: A comprehensive cultural resource survey should be conducted over the entire Floodway, so that significant cultural resources are not destroyed prior to visibility raised by application for Federal action approval.]

4.3.2 Oil and Gas Activities

[PDF page 144]

[PDF page 144, line 24]

"The nature of oil and gas development is a detriment to the enhancement of the environment and, specifically, to the overall natural resource management activities in the ABFS. Such impediments include:

Oil and gas activities require transportation corridors, including roads, bridges, wharves, docks, and pipelines, all of which require the clearing of vegetated areas, as well as containment areas for wells.

Excavated canals for well sites may alter water flow regimes, as well as increase erosion and denude bank lines.

Exploration lines (transects) require some clearing without regard to sensitive habitats."

[Comment: We consider part of the responsibility of the US Army Corps of Engineers, under the National Environmental Policy Act, The Clean Water Acts, and numerous other Federal and State directives and Executive Orders, to be the permitting of oil and gas development under conditions that will protect the environment from unnecessary damage from such activities. The preceding quote suggests that these damages are inevitable. We do not agree. Modern techniques now include tools such as directional drilling, which can be used to avoid sensitive habitats and to reduce aesthetic impact.]

[Recommendation: Appropriate permit restrictions should include avoidance of water flow regime alteration, revegetation where appropriate, avoidance of and attention to sensitive habitats, and maintenance of affected channels long after any initial damage may have occurred. Ongoing maintenance of features should be specified. Removal of abandoned structures, such as oil and gas piping, obsolete storage facilities, and other eyesores should be included in requirements placed on operators granted permission to do business in the Floodway.]

4.3.3 Social and Traditional Cultures

[PDF page 144]

[PDF page 145, line 14]

"The charge upon the management entity of the Heritage Area (the Atchafalaya Trace Commission) is to implement a management plan, including providing assistance to units of government and others in carrying out programs that recognize important resource values within the Heritage Area; encouraging sustainable economic development within the Heritage Area; establishing and maintaining interpretive sites within the Heritage Area; and increasing public awareness of, and appreciation for the natural, historic, and cultural resources of the Heritage Area."

[Comment: The Atchafalaya National Heritage Area is not only a public influence factor to be considered, it is a resource to be used in developing and implementing public policy.]

[Recommendation: US Army Corps of Engineers should endeavor to use information compiled by other agencies to supplement the obvious lack of funding available to achieve aspects of the Corps mission other than flood control.]

Section 5 RESOURCE USE OBJECTIVES
[PDF page 151]

5.1 USACE-Wide Objectives
[PDF page 151]

5.2 Project-Specific Objectives
[PDF page 151]

5.3 Mission Statement for the ABFS
[PDF page 152]

[Comment: Friends of the Atchafalaya supports all of the objectives called out in this section and the mission statement for the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System. We feel that the stated objectives from the historic documents are laudable, although incomplete.]

[Recommendation: We would like to see all of the objectives implemented! We also feel that aesthetic considerations should be incorporated into all Corps Program and Project objectives.]

Section 6 LAND CLASSIFICATION PLAN FOR DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

[PDF page 157]

6.1 Land Allocation

[PDF page 157]

6.1.1 Plan Component Organization for Classification

[PDF page 157, line 18]

The ABFS features are organized as functional land areas that are managed as separate distinct parts of the overall project. These lands and waters are organized as follows:

BDOA - Public Access Feature
IBA - Public Access Feature
SBA - Public Access Feature
Easements of all kinds - Flood Control and Environmental Protection Features
Recreation Lands - Recreation Feature
WMUs
Canal Closures and Water Circulation Improvements - unscheduled and not addressed

Recommendation: Although it is useful to classify Components by function, it should be noted that some of the classifications overlap geographically and others are contiguous, so it is important to look at the overall needs of each identifiable Water Management Unit while attempting to plan features on access, easement or recreation lands.

6.1.2 Land Allocation System

[PDF page 157]

[PDF page 158, line 26]

Mitigation. Land acquired or designated in accordance with authorizing documents to offset losses associated with development of the project. There are no mitigation lands required by this project. Some lands have been used for mitigation planting to offset provisions of a Section 404 permit, but those actions are not directly related to this project."

Recommendation: Even though there are no mitigation lands required by this project, mitigation has been required of Project Partners who have attempted to move ahead on projects approved by the Corps but not executed because of funding or other priorities. Removal of these obstacles would be a significant step forward in stimulating cooperation and promoting the idea that the Corps is really interested in improving water quality and ecosystem health in non-channelized areas.

Section 7 BAYOU DES OURSES AREA, ABFS PUBLIC ACCESS LANDS

[PDF page 163]

7.2 Natural Resources Management Guidelines for BDOA

[PDF page 169]

7.2.2 Fish and Wildlife Management Guidelines

[PDF page 175]

7.2.2.4 Resource Management Compartments

[PDF page 177, line 6]

"The purpose for delineating management compartments in the project master plan is to provide general resource management guidelines for specific areas. Natural and geographic features, as well as habitat types, were primary factors in defining boundaries to separate the compartments. Items considered in the formulation of management recommendations include aesthetics, disease problems, soil erosion potential, wildlife carrying capacity, unique resources, management potential, and manpower and funding."

[Comment: Aesthetics is listed in items considered for formulation of management recommendations yet it is difficult to see how this was actually used in the Master Plan. Appendix H, Annual Management Plan Format, has no indication of the importance neither of aesthetics nor of aesthetic inventory or management.]

7.4 Special problems and Constraints for BDOA

[PDF page 185]

7.4.6 Aesthetics

[PDF page 187, line 36]

"Some habitat management treatments, however necessary to achieve management goals, may be viewed by some members of the general public as offensive. Some treatments impact the aesthetic qualities of the forest more than others, and different people look upon the results of these practices differently. 'Aesthetic standards vary among men. Some will be disturbed by any harvest of mature timber, rejecting arguments that the trees are likely to be blown down or to succumb to insects or disease within a few years in any event. Others will be less disturbed, or not disturbed at all, by the site of the harvested area; they will find a newly established and thriftily-growing forest aesthetically more pleasing than the old one, which in their eyes had passed its prime.'"

[Comment: The statement "Aesthetic standards vary among men." is technically incorrect. After the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act in 1969, aesthetic research was stimulated and it was determined that aesthetics is a measurable item. One of the processes used to come to this conclusion was giving a set of landscape photographs to a group of aesthetically educated people who were asked to arrange the photos from most attractive to least attractive. The photos were then handed to random collections of the general public without an education in aesthetics. The general public put the photos in the same order as those with aesthetic training. At that point the photographs were analyzed in relationship to the art elements of line, form, color, texture, and the art principles of unity, rhythm, balance, etc. An individual can have his or her own values, but there is a general consensus as to what is beauty. The forestry example does not relate to aesthetics but to personal concerns. The USDA Forest Service Visual Management Procedure can direct aesthetically trained personnel to mitigate aesthetic losses with the removal of trees. Trees and art are the same as talking about apples and oranges.]

[PDF page 188, line 1]

[Comment: Age of forest trees has no relationship to aesthetics, but it does have an importance to ecology. Age diversity is an element of environmental complexity. One ecological principle is that a complex environment is a stable environment – complexity leads to stability.]

[PDF page 188, line 9]

"'Programs that are physically feasible and economically sound may founder on public attitudes' (Clawson, 1975)."

[Comment: The reference "Clawson, 1975" is not listed in Appendix A. References.]

[PDF page 188, line 12]

"Forest management practices can enhance the forest as a visual resource."

[Comment: We concur, forest management practices can enhance visual qualities. However, the USDA Forest Service Visual Management Procedure directs that when a project changes an aesthetic value beyond a given standard, the District Ranger call in a professional trained in aesthetics such as a landscape architect to mitigate the change.]

[PDF page 188, line 19]

"'One extreme quality may act as a foil to intensify awareness of the opposite quality' (Brush, 1976)."

[Comment: The reference "Brush, 1976" is not listed in Appendix A. References.

[PDF page 188, line 30]

"An aesthetic zone bordering all major waterways is in place, and stands within the zone will be managed to protect and enhance their scenic qualities. If possible, reforestation activities will be planned to shield timber cut areas from public view."

[Comment: The idea of creating an aesthetic zone bordering all major waterways is strongly supported by Friends of the Atchafalaya. However, the zone should not be a substitute for proper management through out the entire Basin area. The original plan for forestry activities was limited to selective cutting, and we believe that a return to this practice is favorable to large scale cutting especially on publicly owned lands.]

Section 8 INDIAN BAYOU AREA PUBLIC ACCESS LANDS

[PDF page 193]

8.2 Natural Resources Management Guidelines for IBA

[PDF page 202]

8.2.2 Fish and Wildlife Management Guidelines

[PDF page 203]

8.2.2.4 Resource Management Compartments

[PDF page 205, line 11]

"Items considered in the formulation of management recommendations include aesthetics, disease problems, soil erosion potential, wildlife carrying capacity, unique resources, management potential, and manpower and funding."

[Comment: Aesthetics is listed in items considered for formulation of management recommendations yet it is difficult to see how this was actually used in the Master Plan. Appendix H, Annual Management Plan Format, has no indication of the importance neither of aesthetics nor of aesthetic inventory or management.]

8.4 Special problems and Constraints for IBA

[PDF page 216]

8.4.6 Aesthetics

[PDF page 219, line 2]

"Aesthetic constraints on the IBA are the same as those discussed for the BDOA in Section 8.4.5."

[Comment: Having the same aesthetic constraints on the Indian Bayou Area and Bayou Des Ourses Area seems premature since the Corps has not yet made a visual assessment of either area. The areas are in different water management units so it would be reasonable to believe that their visual resources are different. The first step in visual resource management is an inventory of the landscape.]

Section 9 SHATTERS BAYOU AREA, ABFS PUBLIC ACCESS LANDS

[PDF page 223]

9.4 Special problems and Constraints for SBA

[PDF page 232]

9.4.6 Aesthetics

[PDF page 234, line 21]

"Aesthetic constraints on the SBA are the same as those discussed for the BDOA in Section 8.4.5."

[Comment: See the note above for page 219. All areas should be considered on their own merit. An aspect of the Bureau of Land Management Aesthetic Inventory is to inventory objects that take away from the overall visual quality of an area so that these objects can be removed improving the aesthetics of the area.]

Section 10 LANDS ACQUIRED FOR THE ABFS, FLOOD CONTROL AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FEATURES (EASEMENT LANDS)

[PDF page 239]

10.1 Easement Land Allocations and Classifications for Development and Resource Management

[PDF page 239]

[Comment: The current status of Easement Land acquisition is not clear from this or other Sections of the Master Plan.]

[Recommendation: The Master Plan should include discussion and associated maps describing lands currently under flowage, environmental control and developmental easements, and land intended for acquisition of such easements.]

10.1.2 Easement Land Classifications

[PDF page 240]

10.1.2.4 Environmentally Sensitive Areas

[PDF page 240]

[Comment: It is likely that surveys of environmentally sensitive, culturally important, and aesthetically significant areas are required as part of the responsibility to protect such areas. Destruction of the environmentally sensitive swamp areas by neglect and removal of water resources by channel training and other tools should not be accepted on the basis of lack of program activity in those areas. This approach ignores the fact that the Corps is directed through enabling legislation to protect the environment while addressing flood control issues.]

[Recommendation: Comprehensive surveys of the entire Floodway should be addressed in the pending Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.]

10.2 Special problems and Constraints for Easement Lands

[PDF page 241]

10.2.1 Natural Resource Hazards

[PDF page 241, line 38]

"There are no unique [natural] hazards that are different from any other forested areas in the southeast United States."

[Comment: There is no mention of non-natural hazards, of which many exist in all areas of the Floodway, including Easement Lands. Examples include abandoned oil and gas piping and production platforms, abandoned road and railroad structures, obsolete industrial equipment, and outdated warning signage.]

10.2.3 Archaeological and Cultural Resources

[PDF page 242]

[Recommendation: Archeological and Cultural Resource inventories should be completed over the entire Floodway to provide a reference base for decisions concerning permit and easement issues.]

Section 11 RECREATION DEVELOPMENT LANDS ACQUIRED FOR THE ABFS PROJECT BY THE NON-FEDERAL SPONSOR(S)

[PDF page 245]

11.1 Recreation Development Land Allocations and Classifications and Classifications for Development and Resource Management

[PDF page 245]

11.1.2.4 Environmentally Sensitive Areas

[PDF page 246]

[Recommendation: As stated in other areas of these comments, we recommend that inventories be conducted on the entire Floodway to determine the locations of all sensitive areas.]

11.4 Heritage - Special Problems and Constraints for Recreational Development Lands

[PDF page 256]

11.4.5 Aesthetics

[PDF page 256, line 17-26]

"The impact on aesthetics will be considered in all management decisions, and sincere attempts shall be made to minimize any adverse impacts as much as practicable. Particular attention will be given to those areas which receive relatively heavy public use, such as navigable waterways, public access roads, parking areas, boat launch facilities, and interpretive trails. An aesthetic zone bordering all major waterways is proposed, and forested stands within the zone will be managed to protect and enhance their scenic qualities. If possible, reforestation activities will be planned to shield timber cut areas from public view."

[Comment and Recommendations: The beginning sentence, ("The impact on aesthetics will be considered in all management decisions, and sincere attempts shall be made to minimize any adverse impacts as much as practicable.") is right on target and should be made an overriding objective of the Master Plan. We feel that the details of aesthetic expressed in the Master Plan is deficient, and we encourage a greater emphasis on it as prescribed in the in National law.

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and its amendments requires that federal agencies "assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings" Sec. 101(b)2 and "to be conscious of and responsive to the scientific, economic, social, aesthetic, and cultural needs and interests of the Nation; and to formulate and recommend national policies to promote the improvement of the quality of the environment" Sec. 202. The US Army Corps of Engineers sometimes takes the position that this is not a directive to them since they are the Army and not a federal agency. Yet, the Corps has with some projects done good jobs in doing aesthetical analysis and management. At present, this Draft Master Plan is both deficient and negative in addressing aesthetic in the Floodway. In the case of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System we believe that the Corps should reevaluate its Draft Master Plan and its attitude to the importance of Aesthetics.

As you are aware after the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act, many federal agencies adopted procedures for aesthetic evaluation and management. The Department of Agriculture Forest Service was one of the first followed by the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration. One feature of the procedure used by the Forest Service that is especially useful is that a District Forester can use it to measure and discover if it is necessary that they contact a professional such as a landscape architect to come in and mitigate for any potential adverse impact that a project might have on the aesthetics of the landscape.

The Department of the Army, Waterways Experiment Station, Corps of Engineers directed Richard C. Smardon and all to prepare a document entitled Visual Resources Assessment Procedures for US Army Corps of Engineers in 1988. We recommend that you use this procedure as a start for assessing the overall and detailed aesthetic of the Atchafalaya. This Corps process calls for the use of aesthetically trained personnel and allows for flexibility in extraction.]

Section 12 WATER MANAGEMENT UNITS

[PDF page 259]

[Comment: Water Management Units appear to be the only mechanism available in this Plan for the achievement of environmental restoration, yet planning and implementation of efforts in the WMUs has not received adequate attention and Water Management Unit features have not been adequately funded since the approval of the Master Plan.]

12.1 Development and Resource Management for WMUs

[PDF page 259]

12.1.2.4 Environmentally Sensitive Areas

[PDF page 260]

12.1.2.4.1 Ecological Resources

[PDF page 260]

[PDF page 260, line 23]

"At this time, no lands are classified as ecologically sensitive within the two pilot WMUs. If future resources, such as black bear den trees, eagle/kite nests, special rookeries, endangered plant communities, etc., are located, then this designation will be applied to those sites, with a goal to preserve or retain the values associated with these resources within the confines of the real estate interests acquired for this feature."

[Comment: It is our contention that the whole Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System is an environmentally sensitive area and should be treated as such. Statements such as the one quoted above suggest a gross lack of understanding of the conditions in much of the swamp, away from the main channel and its distributaries.]

[Recommendation: Trained biologists should conduct an inventory of sensitive ecological areas in the Floodway so that it will be available when resource conflicts arise or permit applications are submitted for potentially destructive actions. When these occasions arise, there is often little time to gather the needed information.]

12.1.2.4.2 Cultural Resources

[PDF page 260]

"With the exception of the Bayou Eugene Prototype Model Test area, lands have not been surveyed for cultural resources. There is a probability of the presence of significant cultural resources on some of the WMU lands, but until these lands are surveyed and assessed for cultural resources, this land classification cannot be employed. Identification and assessment of any ABFS project-related cultural resources will be under the direction of USACE in coordination with the Louisiana SHPO."

[Recommendation: Trained cultural anthropologists and/or archeologists should conduct an inventory of important cultural resource areas in the Floodway so that it will be available when resource conflicts arise or permit applications are submitted for potentially destructive actions. When these occasions arise, there is often little time to gather the needed information.]

12.1.2.4.3 Aesthetic Resources

[PDF page 260]

[PDF page 260, line 42]

"No lands are classified for aesthetic resources at this time."

[Comment: This condition is unacceptable, considering the aesthetic resources available throughout the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System.]

[Recommendation: Trained specialists should conduct an inventory of important aesthetic areas in the Floodway so that it will be available when resource conflicts arise or permit applications are submitted for potentially destructive actions. When these occasions arise, there is often little time to gather the needed information.]

12.2 Goals of WMUs

[PDF page 261]

[PDF page 261, line 39]

"The modified management goal is to prolong the life expectancy of productive habitat that will become scarce over time (primarily aquatic and bald cypress-tupelo gum habitats)."

[Recommendation: This is a noble goal and implementing efforts should be planned and funded.]

12.3 Implementation Status

[PDF page 262]

[PDF page 262, line 17]

"The WMUs remain unscheduled and unfunded. The State of Louisiana has been identified as the non-Federal sponsor for the WMUs. The state has acknowledged its support for the management unit concept, as well as a phased method of implementation. The state has also acknowledged its support of the WMU plans in the State's 1998 Master Plan."

[Comment: This is an unacceptable situation and requires Federal attention.]

[Recommendation: As mentioned earlier in these comments, Friends of the Atchafalaya supports an increase in priority assigned to the use of Water Management Units for environmental protection and restoration aspects of Floodway feature implementation. We think that the Corps should note the importance of fulfilling these obligations in this and other planning and implementation documents. Annual and long-term budgets should reflect the environmental, cultural and aesthetic requirements identified earlier in these comments.]

12.3 Plan Implementation

[PDF page 262]

12.4.2 Adaptive Management Plan Implementation (Current)

[PDF page 264, line 8]

"In dynamic, living systems, such as evolving swamp ecosystems found in the AFBS project area, traditional approaches do not produce desired or timely results, nor are traditional approaches suited for pilot programs. This is why an Adaptive Management approach is proposed, which allows for modifications or additions in project features based on the continual monitoring of conditions prior to, during, and following project construction. Adaptive management is a continuing process of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation to adjust management strategies and project components to meet the goals and objectives."

[Comment: This wording was retained from the original version of the Master Plan and reads like a very good approach, however, to date, the most adaptive aspect of the implementation in the one pilot unit, Buffalo Cove, has been the transfer of Corps resources to another higher-priority project, thereby leaving the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System project open to damage before the features under construction were even complete. Adaptive management requires a continuing commitment to the pursuit of the goals, not intermittent attention between other needs.]

[Recommendation: As stated in other sections of these comments, Friends of the Atchafalaya supports higher priority application of Water Management Unit modifications, with emphasis on opening traditional flow sources and drainages and removing artificial blockages in natural streams.]

12.5 Buffalo Cove Pilot WMU

[PDF page 266]

[PDF page 266, line 27]

[Comment: This section has not been updated from the original plan, even though the Buffalo Cove Pilot Project has been the focus of all work on Water Management Units in the ABFS. There do not seem to be any "Lessons Learned" from the work in the pilot unit and the subsequent loss of momentum caused by the removal of resources in the middle of the project.]

[Recommendation: The Corps should acknowledge the problems incurred in executing the Buffalo Cove Project, document them as "Lessons Learned" and proceed to improve performance on the next attempt.]

Section 13 IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES, CONCERNS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE ABFS

[PDF page 271]

13.5 Budgetary Issues

[PDF page 273]

[PDF page 273, line 38]

"Issue 1. Recreation Development and Water Management Unit Budgetary Issues. Although authorized, funding for the recreation development feature and the WMU features of the ABFS have not received the same priority as funding for public access and flood control and environmental protection features.

[Comment: This statement implies that environmental protection features have received similar priorities as have public access and flood control features. We believe that this is not the case.]

"Recommendation 1 to Issue 1 (Budget-Recreation Development and WMUs). USACE will continue preliminary planning and upon receipt of funding and programming authority, initiate the development and execution of required decision documents. Upon completion and execution of the required decision documents, USACE will schedule and request funding for the construction of these features.

[Recommendation: US Army Corps of Engineers should recommend additional funding for environmental protection and restoration with the same enthusiasm as it recommends funding for public access and recreation development. WMU funding will be desirable if implementation can be accomplished in a more timely and effective way than have past Water Management Unit efforts.]

"Issue 2. O&M Budgetary Issues. The O&M budget is under- funded at present and cannot be expected to be responsive to what is the future anticipated demand without an increase.

[Comment: One aspect of Operations and Maintenance funding that has not been specifically addressed is that of enforcement of permitted activities in the Floodway. Although these regulated activities may not normally be under the purview of Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System operations, lax implementation of permit conditions and subsequent enforcement have contributed to the poor environmental quality in the Floodway.]

"Recommendation 1 to Issue 2 (O&M Budgetary Issues). It is recommended that sufficient monies be allocated to implement the operation, management, and staffing requirements contained in the approved OMP, which outlines the next 5-year budgetary needs."

[Recommendation: US Army Corps of Engineers should implement new guidelines across departments to allow Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System Operations personnel to participate in identification AND enforcement of permit conditions, and should pursue additional funds for personnel and equipment as required to achieve improvements in permit enforcement.]

13.7 Additional Studies/Plans Needed

[PDF page 274, line 25]

"The ABFS is a dynamic project. Its Master Plan is subject to continual revision. The following represent a list of the future needed plans, studies, and documents that will be required.

"**Master Plan Update**. Annual updates are needed, with a revised plan scheduled for completion in 5 years. The material contained in this plan will be amended and changed as additional lands are acquired and new management issues arise. Chief areas of concern will be management of the public access lands, the recreation development lands and facilities and the WMUs.

"**Operational Management Plan Update**. The OMP is updated annually. As the ABFS project area grows and the O&M responsibilities of the ABFS PO increase, close coordination with the non-Federal sponsor(s) will be necessary in order to develop annual work plans that will achieve the project goals.

"**Cultural Resources**. Under Federal law and regulation for projects of the magnitude of the ABFS, cultural resources efforts are dynamic and will require continual investigation and management activities. Cultural resources surveys and historic properties management plans have been prepared as required in accordance with Federal law and regulation. These efforts and future requirements are ongoing.

"**Recreation Development Plans**. Plans and studies, sufficient to prepare decision documents for recreational development and subsequent plans and specifications, are needed to implement this feature.

"**Water Management Units**. Plans and studies, sufficient to prepare decision documents for the WMUs and subsequent plans and specifications, are needed to implement this feature.

[Recommendation: Based on the continually changing environmental conditions throughout the Floodway, periodic public reviews should be held on the status of water quality, water, swamp and woodland habitat. The information collected should also be incorporated into future planning as part of the adaptive management process.

Such reviews would also provide an opportunity for members of the public to report suspected unauthorized activity for investigation by appropriate authorities.

Section 14 Validation and Approval

[PDF page 279]

[No Comments]