

Friends of the Atchafalaya



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July 18, 2012

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 Project Draft Master Plan dated June 18, 2012

Dear Chief Saucier,

For your general information, Friends of the Atchafalaya was created in 2006 as a private non-profit organization under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Tax Code. "The mission of the Friends of the Atchafalaya is to promote conservation of the historical, cultural, and natural resources of the greater Atchafalaya Basin region, while increasing awareness of the value of these resources in sustaining whole and healthy lifestyles."

We would like to thank and congratulate the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on its 2001 acquisition of additional public access lands within the Atchafalaya Floodway. This was a major step forward in your sub goals: "1) to retain and restore the unique environmental feature 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." Land acquisition through fee or gift is the key to efficient implementation of the above two sub goals of Atchafalaya Basin Floodway Project. We urge you to acquire lands up to your existing cap and to urge Congress to again raise the cap so that lands from willing sellers can be added as public lands within the Basin. The further acquisition of lands will not only aid in the two previously mentioned sub goals, it can also be an important factor in implementing the major goal of flood protection. We should also make it clear that we are in strong support of the overarching necessity of being able to pass a flood as required by the Mississippi River and Tributaries Project. We believe that implementation of the major overall objective of flood passage should always advance with the progress of the two sub goals. An appropriate percentage of any budget relating the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway Project should include moneys for all goals moving forward.



As mentioned in your Draft Master Plan and emphasized with the 2011 spring flood, the Basin as a whole is "drying out" because of sedimentation. This fact should emphasize the importance of moving faster in the implementation of the overall elements of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway Project. One of the issues slowing the progress in the Atchafalaya is the Corps' need to have a positive conclusion and demonstration of success in water management within a water management unit. Water management should be studied and implemented on a total whole and not as a piecemeal process waiting on information that may not be appropriate in a different water management unit. Time is crucial for success and the cost of implementation only increases with delay.

We believe that collaboration and cooperation are important in reaching the Corps' objectives for the Basin. This statement relates to issues both inside and outside the Corps. During the Spring 2011 flood event, it appeared that cooperation was achieved. Federal, State, and Local agencies and non-profit organizations worked together to insure the safe passage of floodwaters. Praise to all that made this happen. It seems however, that examples of lack of cooperation in times of "non-emergency" unfortunately prevail. An internal example relates to the issue of permits. Many of the permits issued do not regulate what is needed nor do they control the continued use or eventual need to return to its original condition. Permitting should work in conjunction with the many aspects of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway Project.

Now that the Atchafalaya is within a National Heritage Area, more people will be attracted to the Basin and aesthetics will become more important. The Indian Bayou Area and Bayou Des Ourses Area are along Interstate 10 that represents the "front door" for ecotourism and a positive economic benefit to the state. At present, this Draft Master Plan is both deficient and negative in addressing aesthetics in the Atchafalaya. We believe that the Corps should re-evaluate its Draft Master Plan in its attitude towards the importance of aesthetics.

Attached to this letter are specific comments that we hope will be beneficial in your completion of the Final Plan. For the convenience of your staff, the Draft Plan sections organize these comments. We anxiously await the completion of the final plan and the implementation of its goals. Please accept our overall support of the Master Plan for the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway and for the goals governing the project.

Sincerely yours,

Charles Fryling, Jr., President
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