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DRAIN THE ATCHAFALAYA?!!?

For months the Atchafalaya Basin has been foremost in Louisiana environmental news. We have been hearing about hearings, proposals have been proposed, and the planners are planning plans. There are many varied and complex ideas on what to do with the Basin to preserve it. For example, Plan GL-70, advocated by the Lizard Lovers League, call for harnessing the kinetic energy of sleeping alligators. Another group, Energy NOW!, Inc., is calling for filling the Basin with crude oil as part of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. Confused by all the plans? Even those persons able to walk and chew gum simultaneously are having difficulties separating fact from fancy regarding the Atchafalaya Basin proposals. Because of the confusion, the Executive Board of the Delta Chapter has decided to act boldly.

On April 1, 1980, the Board voted to change its position concerning the Atchafalaya Basin. While adhering to its earlier decision to keep the Basin "wet and wild," the Board, swayed by the eloquent rationale of new Chairman Stu Phillips, now urges that the Atchafalaya Basin be drained.

"Let's face it," said Chairman Phillips. "This country is having a serious balance-of-payments problem. The one thing the rest of the world needs is our food. Draining the Basin would release hundreds of thousands of acres of rich land for useful soybean production instead of being a breeding ground for mosquitos." Chairman Phillips also suggested the use of the reclaimed acreage for sugar cane production so that Louisiana would become the leader in gasohol production.

But how will the Basin remain "wet and wild"? The Board envisions a series of

community-owned swimming holes and swimming pools that will be built in the Basin. These facilities will be usable year-round, filled with the warm discharge waters of Waterford 3 and the many other nuclear generating plants expected to be built in the area. Ann Duffy, leading even more Inner City outings, will take the underprivileged children from New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Lafayette, and Fat City to the modern, safe facilities to teach them to swim.

Certain sections of the Basin will be kept wild and uninhabited. All existing proposals to keep the Basin wild depend on the good faith of the users and landowners. The Board's proposal relies on no one's good faith and will ensure that designated areas will remain wild in perpetuity: The wild sections of the drained Basin will be used to store toxic chemicals and nuclear waste. No one will come near, and the Basin will be as wild as the dark side of the moon.

The Board did not ignore the pressing question of flood control. If the Basin is drained, where will the flood waters of the Red and Mississippi Rivers go? Life and property must be protected, and the Bonnet Carre spillway is inadequate to handle the volume of water during April and May. However, basic plans already exist to divert waters of the Mississippi, through a series of canals and pumping stations, to arid west Texas. (Some Sierrans will remember that this project was under serious consideration in the early 1970's.) That project can be resurrected and can use the water that would otherwise have gone down the Atchafalaya. There will probably be enough water to permit extension of the canal system to the coal fields of Colorado. There the water can be used to slurry coal back east.

"Efficient use of our water resources is vital." said Chairman Phillips. "Using these

flood waters to irrigate price-supported cotton in Texas and to transport strip-mined coal from Colorado is certainly better than wasting it by dumping it into the Gulf of Mexico. Besides, the toxic chemicals in the water may help kill the bugs in the cotton fields."

In a related action, the Board voted unanimously in favor of a resolution supporting the "Nuke the Whales!" movement.