**Spring Bayou Lake Commission**

The March meeting of the Spring Bayou Lake Commission was held on March 22, 2021, at the LSU Ag Center & 4-H Building in Mansura at 6:00 pm. The guest speaker was Mr. Jody David, Biologist for the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in our area. In attendance were Chairman Jimmy Landry, Vice-Chairman Rayford Laborde, Secretary Terry Laborde, Commissioner Jacques Goudeau, Commissioner Philip Lamartiniere, and Police Juror Bobby Bordelon. Absent were Commissioner Artha Hale, Commissioner Roland Dugas III, Commissioner Jules JK Bordelon, and Commissioner Mayor Kenneth Pickett.

The meeting was called to order at approximately 6:00 pm by Chairman Landry and continued in an open discussion question & answer session with the commissioners and Mr. Jody David. Chairman Landry felt a blanket plan for Spring Bayou dredging, draw down, etc. should be formulated and sent to the police jury. Biologist David stated all management plans by LDWF are subject to specific situations and Spring Bayou does have a LDWF management plan.

From the March 1st meeting, many jurors had requested for Biologist David to attend an upcoming meeting to educate the commissioners on the role of wildlife and fisheries concerning the dam on Little River owned and operated by the Avoyelles Police Jury and on the property of Commissioner Roland Dugas III. The dam is at 40.85-feet above mean sea level.

Last summer a test was conducted on the operation of the gates and it concluded the gates could be opened and closed with relative ease. The police jury should be performing maintenance on the mechanisms since that time. Once the gates at the end of Little River are opened, the water flows down to Bayou Natchitoches.

 Biologist David began his presentation by listing the three reasons to open and close the gates. The three reasons were: (1) habitat improvement, (2) flood control, and (3) aquatic vegetation control. Biologist David numerous times referred to the plans and procedures in effect for the control of the structure by wildlife and fisheries. Many times, the biologist and commissioners discussed the main obstacle to water levels in Spring Bayou, infiltration of silt.

Biologist David stated it is in the set procedures of LDWF to consider opening the gates prior to a hurricane's approach in anticipation of heavy rainfall to reduce the threat of flooding to the camp area. Juror Bordelon added the police jury could meet at any time in an emergency meeting and authorize the opening of the gates if deemed necessary prior to projected flooding. Chairman Landry expressed his desire to have a documented plan in place but Biologist David emphasized every scenario is different with different causes-and-effects so each should be considered unique.

Discussion ensued on the issue of the salvinia in the body of water. Biologist David gave encouraging news saying the recent ice storms and low temperatures did help in the destruction of some of the salvinia, however, it did not eradicate the vegetation and any area with minimal moisture could regenerate the vegetation. Commissioner Goudeau and Vice-Chairman Laborde began a discussion on drawdowns. Chairman Landry began with the number of 39.5-feet of mean sea level. Biologist David gave numerous scenarios and his recommendation for a drawdown would be in the fall when temperatures are in the 70s beginning after Labor Day with a controlled two to three inch drop per day. He did not recommend a drawdown in the heat of the summer months which causes water temperatures to increase and decrease the oxygen content in the shallow warm water leading to other problems. He next expressed the issue faced in other management areas when drawdowns were carried forward and numerous groups (fishermen, hunters, recreation groups, etc.) opposed the procedures in recommendation. Chairman Landry added that previous experience has shown that a drawdown to 39-1/2 feet usually stops the flow of water into Little River from Boggy Bayou at the "hill". Here is where Biologist David added that the infiltration of silt into the complex is "losing the lake". Others added of the recent accumulations of silt into areas of the complex has and will make assess impossible.

Weevils were the next issue. Biologist David said there was no confirmation yet, but it is believed the same ice storm of this winter that may have damaged the salvinia growth may have also probably destroyed the experimental weevils recently introduced into the management area. He continued that the experimental weevils have worked in some bodies of water, but they have not been so effective in others. There is discussion on another species of experimental weevil, but the biologist and most of the commissioners stressed the need for a management plan concerning vegetation for possibly as early as the upcoming year. Biologist David said there is no more contract spraying at this time because of budget issues. The ice storm damaged but did not eradicate the salvinia.

The subject of silt came up again when Commissioner Goudeau asked about sampling. Biologist David said the silt issue is from Old River towards the golf course. He responded that the complex, since the last main dredge in 1989, has accumulations of a half-foot to approximately 18-inches losing a couple of feet in the last four to 5 years. He responded to Goudeau that muck samples may be taken for more accurate data. Biologist David then added that even with dredging, it's natural for bodies of water to fill themselves in so there must be continued maintenance.

Commissioner Goudeau added that the purpose of the commission is to make recommendations to the police jury for water system management. Biologist David said the recommendations from his expertise are forwarded to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries for the state owned bodies of water for their approval or amendments. Most control structures are owned by DOTD, but in Avoyelles by the Avoyelles Police Jury. Spring Bayou is under a management plan that does include drawdowns when deemed necessary.

Drawdowns were again the next topic. Biologist David said he would make and propose a recommendation to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries after holding a public meeting if data evidence recommends the process. According to Biologist David, Spring Bayou is no different from other public bodies of water with its share of public user groups that are vocal on both sides of the drawdown down issue. He stated how most public user groups are against drawdowns. It was added that the Spring Bayou Restoration Team has roots against drawdowns. Normally, most public bodies of water are on a three year management plan. Again his recommendation would be after Labor Day because a summer drawdown has more risk involved. At pool stage, the channel has only ten to twelve feet of water. According to Biologist David, there is concern a three to five foot drawdown would dry up the wooded area because Spring Bayou is considered to be a shallow lake system. Commissioner Lamartiniere questioned why the draw down as stated is not possible. Chairman Landry responded that the buildup of silt and sediment at the "hill" prevents a more successful drawdown of the lake. The group voiced opinion that the 1.5-foot proposed plan would not be enough to successfully kill the salvinia.

Juror Bobby Bordelon stated that the Spring Bayou Lake Commission is the liaison between the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and the Avoyelles Police Jury. The commission would make recommendations and submit them to the jurors for discussion and voting. The commissioners agreed that the submitted plan should be combined with a recommendation from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. The three to five year plan includes wording for a drawdown of up to three feet for habitat improvement but the commissioners in attendance voiced opinions that this was too much in the event of a dry season. Juror Bordelon ensued that some action needs to be taken because of the problems with silt sedimentation and the complex may be lost to the natural processes of nature.

Commissioner Terry Laborde questioned Biologist David about the Spring Bayou management plan. The LDWF representative said the lengthy document is found on the LDWF web site in its entirety and constantly being updated. Biologist David repeated the three reasons for a three to five year draw down and added that there must be recommendations from the user groups along with the commission for a management plan to have a three to five year draw down plan. Commissioner Laborde then asked the biologist for their recommendation for the "hill". He stated that the foot-and-a-half drawdown would probably not be efficient and the hill needs to be removed to allow a greater drawdown. Previous estimates to dredge to remove the hill were approximately $600.000.00. The removal of the hill is in the management plan by LDWF. Next the biologist added that the "fisheries" are in good shape. Sampling showed the abundance of all sizes of fish with specific concentrations in some areas.

With no further business, Commissioner Goudeau introduced a motion to adjourn at 7:39 p.m. Commissioner Laborde added the second and the motion was carried unanimously.

Submitted by Terry Laborde, Secretary Spring Bayou Lake Commission