

False River Watershed Council hosts informative open house

The Cottonport Community Center was opened to Pointe Coupee landowners curious about the progress of the False River restoration project at an open house held by the False River Watershed Council recently.

Members of the council, which also includes representatives from multiple state agencies, were on hand to answer questions and provide updates on the various components of the rehabilitation project.

"There's a lot more to this project than just drawdowns, and this is a great way for us to connect with the community and explain the entire project in more detail than we can in our regular meetings," said Rep. Major Thibaut (D-New Roads).

"We've spent a lot of time identifying the various causes [of habitat loss], and putting together a comprehensive plan that both minimizes further damage, and ad-

resses the siltation that's already in the lake," continued Thibaut.

Over the years, silt pouring into the lake, primarily from drainage canals at both ends of False River, has significantly reduced the amount of aquatic vegetation and covered the natural shell beds game fish need for breeding.

With the construction of a series of weirs, or rock structures, in both of the large canals draining into the lake, engineers plan to more effectively control the flow of runoff into False River, and in turn reduce the amount of silt and other contaminants that reaches the lake.

"The bid has been awarded, and the material is in transit. We should be making some real progress over the next few weeks, and hope to be finished by the end of September," said Kevin Gravois, project engineer from Professional Engineering Corporation (PEC).

To combat the accumulation of existing silt in the lake bottom, the

council has recommended a multi-phased approach that includes a combination of removal and consolidation strategies.

Residents or visitors to the south end of the lake are familiar with Phase I of the removal project, where a manmade island was created to hold silt dredged from the shallow lake bed, known as the "flats." With that work complete, attention is now focused on the north end, where the plan is to remove another 200,000 cubic yards of fill.

The council is currently exploring options for relocating the material, as an island is less feasible on the north end due to the population density.

"We'd like to move the silt completely out of the lake, but for that to happen, we need to find a piece of property between 25 to 100 acres in near proximity to the north end, and a landowner willing to let us deposit that river silt," said

Gravois, pointing to a map of the north flats.

Previous efforts to pump the silt to the Mississippi River were also discussed, however the council changed course after learning that the cost would be about \$200,000 more than has been budgeted for the silt removal.

While the Phase II planning is ongoing, the Pointe Coupee Parish Police Jury recently announced their approval of a 10-year drawdown plan based on the recommendations of the LA Wildlife and Fisheries and the Watershed Council. The drawdowns are scheduled every third year, beginning with the fall of 2017.

Representatives from the Wildlife and Fisheries provided an overview of the mechanics of the drawdowns, in addition to "before and after" pictures from the last drawdown.

During a drawdown, the water level is lowered by five to six feet, and portions of the lake bottom are exposed and allowed to dry out. While exposed, the silt tends to settle and compact, allowing the natural shell beds to rise to the surface. Grasses and small plants that flourish during each drawdown also develop root systems that help maintain the compaction, even after the plants die when the water levels rise in the spring.

"If we can keep the silt from floating freely in the water, we're able to improve water clarity, the amount of sunlight that reaches the bottom of the lake, and our chances for re-establishing aquatic vegetation," said Brian Heimann,

a biologist with the Wildlife and Fisheries.

Council members also fielded questions related to the newly-adopted bulkhead ordinance, which requires landowners to seek permits for shoreline work on False River after August 11. The ordinance outlines minimum construction requirements for bulkheads, including the use of turbidity, or wave, management structures.

"We learned that scouring at the base of these walls caused a significant amount of silt to be stirred up and relocated, which likely contributed to many of the failures over the last few years," said Arthur Ewing, a Watershed Council member and a proponent of the ordinance.

"This ordinance compliments the long-term drawdown plan by giving guidance to property owners on wall design, and improving water clarity by reducing the impact of waves on the lakebed," he continued.

The ordinance also clarifies the public/private property boundary along False River, which had previously referenced a lower-resolution survey map from 1972.

Watershed Council meetings are open to the public, and the next meeting is scheduled for August 23rd at 3 p.m. at the Police Jury meeting room. Property owners interested in receiving silt dredged from the north end of the lake should call Gerald Babin with PEC Engineering at 225-769-2810.



Interested citizens examine a map of False River that shows the different aspects of the lake restoration projects.

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