

Many attendees leave drawdown meeting unsatisfied

by Tommy Comeaux

A standing room only audience was on hand to hear experts give their explanation for the failure of some bulkheads on False River following the drawdown that's part of the restoration of the lake, but many were unsatisfied with the answers they received.

The False River Civic Association (FRCA) held the meeting last Wednesday evening to accommodate numerous lakeside residents who have complained their bulkheads have failed because of the drawdown, but engineers said the bulkhead failures were not the fault of the lowering of the water level from 16 feet to about 13.5.

About 15 people raised their hands when moderator state Rep. Major Thibaut asked if they had problems with their bulkheads, but FRCA members told The Banner

after the meeting there were many more.

Thibaut said the lake restoration project is important not only to Pointe Coupee, but to the rest of the state and tried to assure the audience that the work was being done properly and as funds allowed.

The comment that generated the most dissatisfaction may have been one from Chris Knotts, an engineer with two degrees from LSU and a master's from the University of Texas-Arlington, a professional engineer with 31 years of experience.

"The drawdown didn't cause the failures," he said. "The drawdown exposed existing issues with the bulkheads."

One resident, Troy LeBlanc, was obviously not at all satisfied with Knotts' explanation.

"The water level is the problem," he said, and while there was talk from several of the engineers on

hand at Thibaut's invitation, he said he believed "There is not enough difference in the soil conditions for that to be the fault. I think you all are just trying to talk over our heads."

"If the drawdown is not the cause, then why do we have dozens and dozens of bulkheads that are failing now," said L.J. Grezaffi, one of many who say their bulkhead is collapsing because of the drawdown.

Gerald Babin of Professional Engineering Corp., the firm overseeing the lake restoration project, said his company would look at any bulkhead that had problems and report back to the landowner to explain what the problem was, handing out forms for those residents to fill out.

He said he's heard residents have reported anywhere "from a

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Despite what engineers told the attendees at a meeting on the drawdown hosted by the False River Civic Association many of them refused to believe the lower water level was not the cause of lakeside bulkhead failures.

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little bit of damage to a good deal of damage" and "each instance is unique."

"We're going to analyze each and every one separately," Babin said.

One lakeside resident, who would not identify himself, said he believed what was being told to the audience at last Wednesday's meeting was "hogwash."

"Through the years, we haven't had hardly any problems with bulkheads but since the drawdown, we've had many, many of them fail and I think it's because the water level was lowered," he said.

"I find it impossible to believe that the drawdown didn't have something to do with it."

(Editor's note: Because of the complexity of the issue and the long history behind it, this is the first of several articles on the restoration and its possible effects and benefits.)

