



Lafayette Parish Bayou Vermilion District

February 4, 2004

Mireya Laigast
Project Manager
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,
New Orleans District
Attention: CEMVN-PM-W
P O Box 60267
New Orleans LA 70160-0267

Dear Mireya,

The Lafayette Parish Bayou Vermilion District ("BVD") was formed in 1984 through enabling legislation of the State of Louisiana for the purpose of improving the water quality of and beautifying the Vermilion River; and doing any and all other acts which would enhance the general condition of the Vermilion River. BVD is supported by a Parish wide maintenance and operations property millage.

The reason the citizens of Lafayette felt the need to form BVD, and voted to tax themselves, was because of the degradation of the river over the prior several decades. Citizens at one time regularly swam in the river. The river today is classified as impaired for both primary and secondary uses.

In the past fishing was widely engaged in both commercially and for recreation. Today very few people fish the Vermilion River. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries undertook a restocking of the river with striped bass in the early 1990's. Though no official follow-up study was done, informal surveys have found that the bass population is minimal if not extinguished within the Vermilion. Anecdotal evidence is that the river was once clear to several feet. Today, visibility reaches to several inches at best.

It was once a favorite outing for boaters and canoeists. Beaver and river otter were abundant. Alligators were a regular sighting. The riparian habitats were home to numerous plants and animals. The river habitat today is either abandoned or sparsely populated by the animals that had once made the Vermilion home.

- page 2 -

Major strides have been accomplished in identifying and addressing most point sources of pollution entering the river. The real work will be in alleviating the remaining point and non-point sources. The major contributors to degradation appear to be low dissolved oxygen due to organic matter, fertilizers and fecal coliform entering the river; and suspended solids which enters the river at its source, the Teche Bayou and all along its course. The riparian habitats have been degraded by erosion, development and poor land management.

The Vermilion River's ecosystem has been further degraded by the extensive expansion and concreting of its tributaries and sub-watersheds for flood control purposes. The control of flooding is a top priority, and we support it fully. But the result of these past efforts has been to bring great volumes of water rushing at great rates of flow into the river during rain events. The river is also slow to fall after these quick rises. The sudden, drastic and frequent changes to the river's level and flow makes a poor habitat for those animals and fish that had long been a part of the river's ecosystem. This sudden rise and rush of water, and slow falling, also destroys riparian habitats that struggle to make headway during drier periods.

I request that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District, investigate this degrading ecosystem under the authority of Section 206 of the Water Resource Development Act of 1996, as amended. The Lafayette Parish Bayou Vermilion District hereby expresses our willingness to serve as the non-Federal sponsor.

I understand that non-Federal cost sharing would be required for the Project Modification Report, plans and specifications, and project construction. We are capable of fulfilling our financial obligations: in general, providing 35 percent of the total project cost which includes furnishing lands, easements, right-of-way, relocations, and disposal areas, and we will operate and maintain the project upon completion. We are also aware that both the Corps' and our responsibilities will be delineated in the Project Cooperation Agreement, which both parties will execute before construction commences.

If you have any questions, or need additional information please contact me via phone, snail-mail or e-mail (kerry@bayouvermilion.org).

Respectfully submitted,



Kerry Collins
Executive Director

River's needs run long

Tax sought to keep Vermilion restoration efforts flowing

Richard Burgess
rburgess@theadvertiser.com

LAFAYETTE

Employees of the Bayou Vermilion District spend a lot of time just keeping the trash and trees out of the river.

They'd like to be doing a lot more, said Director Kerry Collins, but there's only so much money, so many hours in the day and so many people.

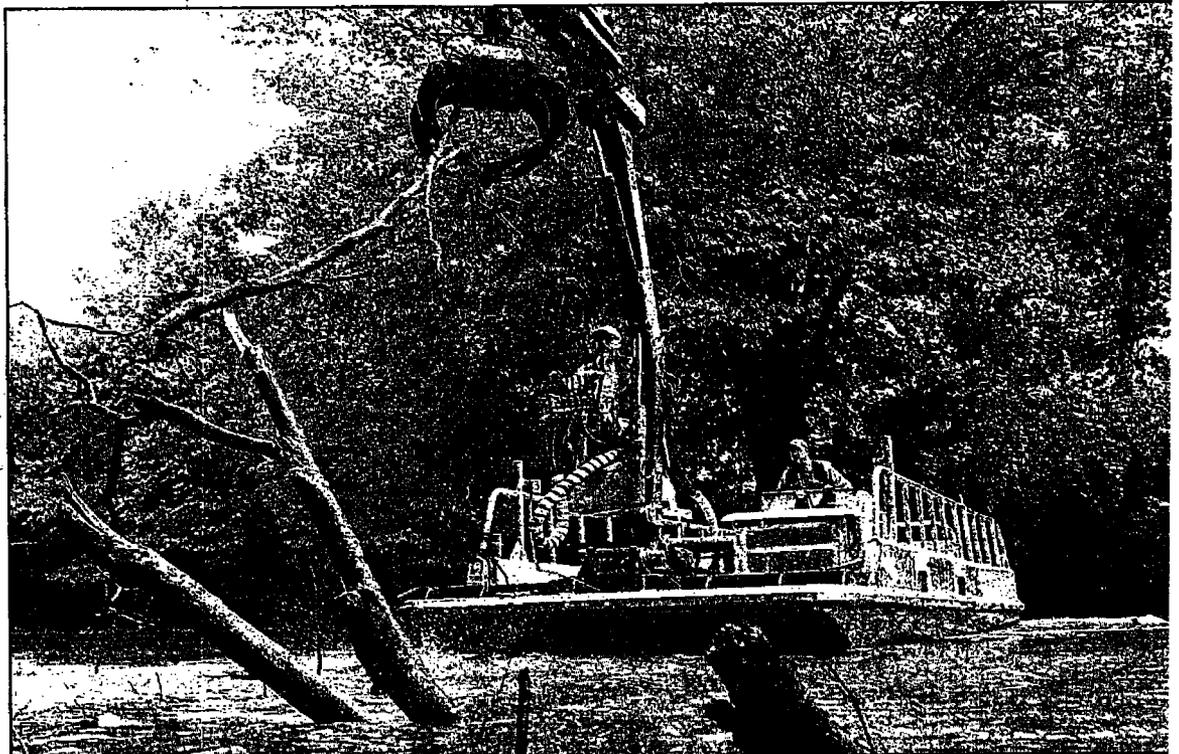
"We know what needs to be done," he said. "It's just a matter of doing it."

The district will ask voters on Nov. 15 to approve a 0.45-mill property tax to support a wide-range of restoration projects, flood-control efforts and improvements to parks and boat launches along the Vermilion River.

The Bayou Vermilion District was created in the 1980s to address water quality in a river once considered one of the most polluted waterways in the nation, a victim of sewage, agricultural run-off and wastewater from factories.

Twenty years later, Collins and others say the major problems have been addressed, though swimming is still not recommended, and there is still work to be done.

"Water quality has made tremendous strides since the Bayou Vermilion District began. If you go back to the condition back then, it was scary," said naturalist Bill Fontenot, curator of the Acadiana Park Nature Station. The 119 acres of bottom-lands hardwood sits on the edge of the river.



John Rowland/jrowland@theadvertiser

The Bayou Vermilion District is working to keep the Vermilion River free of debris. Here, Dave Sanders operates a barge pulling collapsed trees and limbs from the river recently, while John Stewart controls the barge. If voters approve a service property tax, it will fund \$4 million more to the district.

little things" that need to be addressed, such as the smaller septic systems that are not up to health standards and urban waste flowing from streets and yards.

But some of the major projects left undone have more to do with the effects of concrete and rain.

Most of the water that falls on Lafayette during a heavy rainstorm rushes to the Vermilion because there is so much concrete that the water has no other place to go. And once in the river, the water has

For more information:

For more information, contact the Bayou Vermilion District at (337) 237-8360, or visit their Web site at www.bayouvermilion.org.

off the areas it overflowed for relief.

The rapid rise the rain brings causes flooding, as well as erosion along the river's edge.

Some developers are required to build retention ponds to hold the water back from the river

effort is needed, said Lafayette City-Parish Government Assistant Director of Public Works Bill Campbell.

"We need regional retention facilities. We have to come up with larger areas for retention," he said.

Collins said that some of the bond money would be used to partner with private developers to build more retention ponds.

Another chunk would go to a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project that reconnects the river with

tion ponds, as they before the areas were off from the river by trees, Collins said.

Wetlands also help filter pollutants from water.

"It all works hand in hand," Collins said.

Other planned projects include planting trees and shrubs along the river banks to help halt erosion.

Collins said that erosion would mean dirt in the water, which would make the river more hospitable to fish and other aquatic life.

River

But perhaps the most noticeable problem to most residents has been the trash floating down the river.

"All the trash that people throw in a ditch in this parish eventually ends up in the river," Campbell said.

Becky Longman, whose backyard on Camellia Drive slopes down to the river, says she has to pick up trash brought into her yard by the rising river after nearly every heavy rain.

"It seems to have gotten worse," she said. "People just throw their trash in there."

Besides the usual litter, Bayou Vermilion District workers spend a lot of time hauling out tires, washing machines, refrigerators "or whatever else someone throws in," Collins said.

Collins said that some of the money from the proposed tax would help make that job a bit easier.

One proposal calls for structures that would prevent logjams at bridges that take a lot of effort to clear, Collins said.

Another calls for equipment to make it easier to unload trash from the district's barges.

"Right now, we have to haul it up the bank — barrel by barrel, tire by tire," Collins said. "Simply by improving what we do, getting equipment to make it more efficient, we can do more without additional operating funds."

A separate tax funds the district's general operations, supporting an annual budget of about \$500,000 and a staff of eight.

What's the tax bill?

The owner of a \$125,000 home would pay about \$2.25 a year if the .45-mill tax is passed on Nov. 15. The millage, called a debt service tax, would be assessed until the bonds are paid off. If the Bayou Vermilion District takes out the full \$4 million in bonds, the tax would stay in place for about 20 years, though the millage is expected to lower after the first 10 years. The tax would be an extension of sorts of the district's .45-mill debt service that is now assessed to pay off the construction of current parks and boat launches on the river.

What the .45 mills property tax would fund:

- Provide matching funds of up to \$2 million for a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project to restore the Vermilion River ecosystem. The work aims to make the river more friendly for fish and wildlife, slow erosion and keep the river from flooding homes and businesses during heavy rainfall.

- Fund up to \$2 million in other restoration efforts and the improvement and expansion of parks and boat launches.

A few of the specific plans:

- Expansion of the Beaver Park boat launch and boardwalk

- A new park and/or boat launch in the north end of the parish

- Improvements to the North Launch beneath Interstate 10

- Improvements at the Acadiana Nature Station

- Purchase land and easement for conservation and habitat restoration

- A permanent exhibit at the Lafayette Natural History Museum on the natural history of the Vermilion River watershed

- Boardwalks near the new Camellia Bridge

SOURCE: Bayou Vermilion District