Spring Bayou Lake Commission Meeting January 24, 2022

The Spring Bayou Lake Commission committee met on January 24, 2022, at 6:00 p.m. in the meeting room of the 4-H Building in Mansura. Committee members present were Chairman Rayford Laborde, Secretary Terry Laborde, Commissioner Artha Hale, Commissioner Roland Dugas III, Commissioner Jacques Goudeau, Commissioner Jules JK Bordelon, and Commissioner Philip Lamartiniere. Mayor Kenneth Pickett was absent. We had a packed meeting room while still appropriate COVID spacing regulations.

The meeting consisted of various discussions with a focus on the opening of the gates on the weir of Lil River in order to do a drawdown. The LDWF is requesting the opening of the weir, which is under the control of the Avoyelles Police Jury, with an emphasis on the control of the Giant Salvinia in the complex.

Brad Launey, Inland Fisheries Biologist with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, began the meeting with a power-point presentation on the concerns of the growth of the Giant Salvinia. He was assisted by Wesley Maddox, Aquatic Plant Biologist with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. The Giant Salvinia is native to Southeastern Brazil and spreads widely by fragmentation. This aquatic vegetation has a reproductive cycle that is strictly vegetative by spores. Under favorable natural conditions, biomass can double in about one week to ten days. The winter blast freeze of February of 2021 damaged the vegetation, but the warm summer months allowed for increased growth. The vegetation is strictly a fresh water species and doesn’t tolerate brackish or marine environments. It displaces other floating vegetation forming dense mats killing submerged vegetation and reduces the oxygen levels of the water.

The management plan for the Giant Salvinia is a tri-fold plan with chemical, mechanical, and biological aspects. In chemical control, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries maintain small areas, but contract applications use boats and aerial means. In the year 2017-99.9 acres were sprayed, then in 2018 388.42-acres were sprayed, then in 2019 659.90-acres were sprayed, then in 2020 720.70-acres were sprayed, then in 2021 706.38-acres were sprayed in Spring Bayou. The main chemicals used were Glyphosate (.75 gal per acre) and Flumioxazin (12 oz per acre). Increased cost up to 150% increase has caused problems. Concerning the mechanical controls, Containment Booms have been used. The floating yellow/orange tube-like structures limit the movement of the plants and act as containment for herbicide applications. This is widely used in Chicot Lake. Draw downs are a second mechanical control which can target shoreline plants, they can affect entire water bodies, and they can remove large quantities of vegetation at low cost. The current biological controls include the weevils and the triploid carp. In 2020, 44K weevils were introduced to Spring Bayou then 32K was added in 2021. LSU research indicates a high winter mortality of adults due to freezing temperatures and weevils fail north of the 32o North Latitude. The weevil populations from temperate zones in north Central South America are more tolerant to the cold than populations from Louisiana.

Chairman Rayford Laborde called the meeting to order at 6pm. Launey’s power point presentation gave the rationale for the possibility of a draw down in Spring Bayou to control the Giant Salvinia as part of the Spring Bayou vegetation control plan and also fish spawning benefits. He said the vegetation needs to be dried out for a long time period to dry the substrate or an extensive freeze with the temperature staying below the freezing point for seven to ten days. The target is the shoreline plants. Launey’s plan is to avoid a summer draw down. Police Juror Bobby Bordelon questioned Launey on the process relating to a sponge absorbing and Launey acknowledged the process as long as the substrate dries.

Benny Bordelon questioned the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries officials on the number of days required for complete killing of the vegetation. Launey responded with a variety of factors that need to come into play. Commissioner Hale and Perry Scioneaux questioned the roll of the “hill” at the top of Lil River and the management level of 39-feet. Mr. Maddox responded that without management there is exponential growth of the vegetation and the increasing cost of the chemicals is another factor. Mr. Maddox said the mat could easily grow from six inches to two feet. He added that the draw down management will increase the fish productivity. Penn Lemoine questioned the effects of a draw down on Old River. Launey responded the vegetation will fill within five years. According to Benny Bordelon, a draw down will centralize the Giant Salvinia to which Maddox responded that crews could come in and easily spray the vegetation. Ronald Coco added his expertise saying the thicker the mat, the more moisture held. The response from Maddox was that LDWF tries to spray as much as possible but aerial spraying has increased from $10,000.00 a day to $20,000.00 a day. Rosa cane and sedimentation caused by the removal of the Madame Gilmore weir in Old River were the next issues.

Concerning Biological Control the LDWF officials explained the role of the grass carp and the weevils. Maddox estimated many weevils died in the ice storm of 2021, but weevils need about five years to sustain a population. Chairman Rayford Laborde requested information on the newly developed breeds of weevils. Maddox responded that the new breeds seem to be more tolerant to the cold. Weevil larvae attack plants and are sexual reproducers. Brouilette asked the officials about the number of weevils. Maddox says the limited number of weevils must be shared throughout Louisiana. Maddox explained the use of weevils is only to control and never eradication. Maddox added that the weevils take years to reach the level of control and migrate to new growth in the bodies of water. According to Maddox, a decrease in the surface area of the Giant Salvinia aids in the action of the weevils. According to Jimmy Landry, weevils sexually reproduce three times a year.

Police Juror Bobby Bordelon gave his opinion that something must be done before we “lose” Spring Bayou, but at the same time balance hunting and fishing. He indicated the Avoyelles Police Jury owns the gates down Lil River and his biggest concern with a drawdown is fisheries. Bordelon complimented the Spring Bayou Restoration team for the grass carp. Committee member Jacques Goudeau questioned the 39-foot level. Launey responded that that is the LDWF recommendation for the lowest safe level. He added that all area lakes are stocked annually. Back to the 39-foot level, Launey indicated that three to four months is the prime consideration even if a big inconvience to hunters, but it will not harm the complex.

David Lemoine began a lengthy explanation of his experience with a draw down. He complimented the spraying done from 2011 to 2014 to which there was more open waters. Then the carp took care of the hydrilla. It’s his opinion, spraying is maintaining the vegetation. The American Lotus is clogging Grand Lake. Lemoine reminded the audience that Giant Salvania is spread from lake to lake as the vegetation attaches to boat trailers when loading then falls off when the trailer is backed into another body of water.

Dredging was the next issue. It’s Commissioner Roland Dugas’ opinion that dredging the hill would produce the biggest impact on the complex. He indicated permission should be sought from land owners to dredge that portion. Jimmy Landry added that former Biologist Jody David had calculated the cost to be about one million dollars, but the problem was where to put the dredged material. Commissioner Dugas repeated his opinion to dredge the “hill” for a distance of approximately two-tenths of a mile. Launey added that the original proposal was to dredge four feet deep and twenty feet wide. Launey said keeping the 39-foot level will maintain the oxygen supply. Commissioner Dugas stated he would pump water as needed for his agricultural operation. He indicated he has pumped to that level before with no problems arising. There were different views on the pumping expressed, but most views expressed said pumping was not the issue. Commissioner Goudeau read from an Attorney General opinion stating pumping for agricultural reasons is allowed, but limited if there is a scarcity.

Next was the alligator issue surfaced by David Lemoine. Some views expressed said the low levels of water would produce a feasting fury for gators, but Maddox opposed these theories.

Chairman Rayford Laborde was blunt saying, “Will 39-feet do it?  
 Launey responded it would help. More comments were made to obtain the signature from the land owner at the “hill”. Questions then surfaced about the low water levels in relation to launching boats at docks in the complex. Commissioner Dugas said there were no problems in 2015 when the levels were at 39-feet.

At 7:40 pm, Commissioner Goudeau made a motion to adjourn and Commissioner Terry Laborde added a second to the motion. It was unanimous.