

**SWAMP WARS:  
THE FIGHT FOR THE  
ATCHAFALAYA BASIN**



Atchafalaya  
**BASINKEEPER®**

Annual Report 2016-2017

## A Word from Your Atchafalaya Basinkeeper

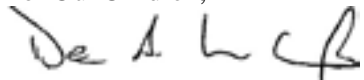
A huge welcome to our new Staff Attorney, Misha Mitchell, and new Development Director, Katherine Barney. We are all very lucky to have two such talented and bright new people in our movement to save our Basin. Their wits and talents will be put to the test as we continue working to protect the Basin against all odds.

The last twelve months had been very hard for Baton Rouge, Lafayette, and many towns around the Atchafalaya Basin. Massive historic flooding has directly or indirectly affected most of our members in our region. This catastrophic weather event reminds us of how important is to protect the Basin's wetlands: a spillway to protect us from future floods. Atchafalaya Basinkeeper responded to the flood by bringing our boat to rescue people in the O'Neil Lane area of Baton Rouge. As our communities focus on recovery, threats to the Atchafalaya Basin are mounting. Plans by the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources to use public funds for projects that will silt up the Basin continue to progress, cypress logging in the Basin has begun again and new pipelines on illegal rights-of-way are proposed. Despite all this, the biggest loss for me personally, and for ABK, is the passing of our dear friend and volunteer Judith Zoble Gardner.

This has been a year of great victories, great losses, and huge new challenges to preserve our beloved Atchafalaya Basin. For many years ABK has been putting out fires in a desperate effort to stop the destruction of our Basin and protect what is left for generations to come. All of our members should know that we are fighting to protect the Atchafalaya Basin with very few resources against incredible odds and the people determined to destroy it are not going anywhere, their political muscle stronger than ever. Our main weapons are, and always have been, love against hate, truth against lies, unselfishness and generosity against greed.

It is the support of our members, sponsors, volunteers, and partner organizations that allows us to keep up the fight to protect Atchafalaya wetlands and Louisiana's cypress forests. Thank you for taking a stand on this epic battle to protect our very special corner of this planet.

For Our Children,



Dean A. Wilson

## In Memoriam ~Judith Zoble Gardner~

It is very hard for me to write about Judith, the wound that her loss left in my heart is too fresh, the thought of her passing so hard to bear. No one loved the Atchafalaya Basin more than Judith, and for reasons that are still a mystery to me, very few people other than my own family knew me as well as Judith did. She loved the Basin and she fought valiantly to protect it. For many years, Cara and Judith were like two sisters fighting together to keep ABK afloat. For many years, every single thank you letter or gift sent to our members was sent by Judith, and all envelopes and postage were paid by

Judith and her husband John. Judith and John came to all of our events, helped us send all of our mailouts, and volunteered every time it was needed. It is so hard to think that this fearless woman is no longer with us!

Judith was more than our friend, she was our hero, and will forever be missed.

-Dean Wilson

Judith Zoble Gardner  
receiving the 2015  
Atchafalaya Basin Award  
from Cara Leverett



## **Atchafalaya Basin: Overall Status**

The major threats to the long-term integrity of the Atchafalaya Basin's ecosystems are:

- excessive sediment
- unsustainable cypress logging
- widespread illegal development of wetlands
- oil and gas industry activities
- impaired water quality
- noncompliance with permits and lack of enforcement of our environmental laws

Cypress logging in the Atchafalaya Basin resumed again last fall, east of the Whiskey Bay Pilot Channel and south of I-10.

The biggest threat to the Atchafalaya's swamps comes with the reviving of the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources' (LDNR) East Grand Lake project (EGL), made possible by The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

Our challenges against illegal development and the Corps of Engineers' (Corps) practice of issuing after-the-fact permits continue. Alongside excessive sedimentation and cypress logging, illegal development of wetlands is one of the biggest threats to the future of the Atchafalaya Basin.

Last year the Louisiana black bear was prematurely delisted for what we believe to be mainly political reasons. This delisting has a huge impact in our legal actions in the Basin. We are prepared to challenge the bear's delisting in the coming months.

Efforts to privatize our public waters and waterways continue, and ABK is working to stop them.

## **2017 Atchafalaya Awards**

On January 29, 2017, Cara Leverett and Jody Meche were honored with our Atchafalaya Awards for their years of work protecting Louisiana's wetlands and the Atchafalaya Basin. Cara Leverett received the Atchafalaya Angel Award engraved with the following: Atchafalaya Angel Award.

With eternal gratitude to Cara N. Leverett for years of selfless devotion to protect Louisiana's wetlands and the Atchafalaya Basin. You are our hero and you are one of God's most beautiful Angels!

Cara served the organization for nine years. When Cara started working for ABK, we were much smaller, with roughly 100 members we were facing the biggest financial crisis in the organization's history. Cara created and implemented our first fundraising plan, and quickly became the heart of the organization. Working tirelessly day after day, she increased our membership to over 1,000 members and secured us the grant funding that keeps ABK in business today. We will forever be grateful to Cara for everything she has done for the Atchafalaya Basin and for Atchafalaya Basinkeeper.

Jody Meche received our fifth Super Swamper Award from Atchafalaya Basinkeeper engraved with the following: Super Swamper Award to Jody Meche, one of God's chosen champions for the Atchafalaya Basin, with tremendous gratitude for your integrity and courage, putting up a herculean fight to save what is left of the Atchafalaya Basin for generations to come. You are "the ultimate Super Swamper," our champion, our hero.

Among his many titles, Jody serves as president of LCPA-West and a member of ABK's Board of Directors. A Cajun commercial fisherman, Jody has been on the frontlines protecting the Atchafalaya Basin and the right of access to public waters by his community and the public for over twenty-five years. Fearless and incorruptible, Jody has fought relentlessly to protect the Basin at great cost to himself and his family. We are proud and thankful to have him working with us.

## **Summary of activities in 2016**

In 2016, with help from our Board of Directors, Board of Trustees, and members, ABK managed to increase its membership to 1,120 (up from 1,000 members in January 2016). About 40% of our annual budget came from memberships, business sponsorships, and other direct donations. The other 60% of our budget came from the generous support of foundations. We are very thankful for the support of our foundations, members, and sponsors for making ABK's work possible in 2016-17!

## **Louisiana Black Bear Delisting**

Despite strong opposition by most environmental groups, and by Paul Davidson with the Louisiana Black Bear Conservation Coalition, the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife delisted the Louisiana black bear from the list of threatened and endangered species in March of 2016. There are as few as approximately 500 bears in the entire state (from a maximum of 400 bears before the listing in the 90's), and evidence that an integral population segment is not expanding. There has also been large-scale development on land that was targeted as permanently protected corridors for safe migration of black bears and other wildlife.

This delisting was a political decision and we plan to challenge it in court as soon as possible. The only environmental NGO that commented in favor of the delisting was The Nature Conservancy.

## **ABK and Big Oil**

Enterprise Products Operating LLC's second permit to lay a pipeline along an illegally-built pipeline canal was approved. This right-of-way is out of compliance with the original permit. In addition to being out of compliance with the original permit conditions, the Corps is unable to enforce the terms of the permits because the enforcement department does not own a boat to use for monitoring violations and permit compliance.

Enterprise recently applied for an additional permit for a different pipeline to use the same right-of-way as its existing, previously approved pipeline. ABK is opposing the permit after multiple failed attempts to meet with the company to find ways to minimize impacts during construction.

Bayou Bridge Pipeline, LLC applied for the necessary permits to construct a crude oil pipeline (the southern leg of the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline) that will run from Texas to the Mississippi River across the Atchafalaya Basin. Bayou Bridge Pipeline, LLC is a corporation jointly owned by Energy Transfer Partners, Sunoco Logistics, and Phillips 66. Energy Transfer Partners is responsible for the Florida Gas pipeline in the Basin, a pipeline that is out of compliance with its original permit. If the permits are granted, ABK is prepared to take legal action. It is negligent for our agencies to give permits to companies that fail to comply with previous permits.

We have already seen illegal pipelines devastate our Basin and our coast, and this pattern must stop if we wish to preserve the Basin. These illegal rights-of-way impede public access, degrade water quality, and inhibit the natural function of the Basin to act as a spillway for floodwaters.

## **Oil Spills**

Due to death threats and other reprisals by certain oil companies, ABK is reporting all oil spills, cover-ups, and illegal discharges anonymously and, therefore, will no longer be able to keep our members updated about these issues. We want to assure all our members and the public that we will continue to take whatever actions are necessary to expose oil companies that try to cover up spills or illegally discharge produce waters into our wetlands.

## **Assaults Against ABK and LCPA-West**

Two different assaults took place against LCPA-West president and ABK Board of Directors member Jody Meche. Recently the lugs on one of Jody's trailer tires were purposely loosened, which caused the tire to come off on I-10. Luckily there were no injuries, but this dangerous situation could easily have resulted in injury or death for Jody or another driver. In a separate incident, Jody took a film-maker into the Basin to film illegal development, and when they returned to the landing one of the windows of Jody's truck had been smashed, as had a window of the film-maker's vehicle.

Such attacks against the people who fight to protect Louisiana's treasured natural heritage are inexcusable. Similarly, clearcutting our swamps, illegal developing, and destroying our wetlands by filling them up with sediment are inexcusable, and rob our children and grandchildren of their rightful inheritance.

## Monitoring and Enforcement

In 2016, Atchafalaya Basinkeeper (ABK) and the Delta Chapter of the Sierra Club conducted seven monitoring flights and reviewed most permits and permit applications for work in wetlands through the New Orleans District of the Corps of Engineers.

In addition to cypress logging, we monitor for illegal pollution and illegal development of wetlands. We are immensely grateful to SouthWings, and all volunteer pilots, who make it possible for ABK to monitor by air.

## Swamp Shield Campaign

It is with great distress that we must report that cypress logging started again in the Atchafalaya Basin last fall, and we anticipate it to continue as the water recedes. The landowner responsible for the logging happens to be one of the landowners that will benefit most if the Atchafalaya Basin Project/East Grand Lake project (discussed further herein) is fully approved. ABK believes that the logging roads are illegal, and we have reported the violations to the Corps, though there is little hope that the Corps will take any action. Atchafalaya Basinkeeper will do anything in our power to stop this unsustainable and illegal logging operation.

The Swamp Shield Campaign is a coordinated effort by ABK and our allies to shield cypress-tupelo swamps from further destruction, by stopping any threats to our forests as early as possible. This proactive program allowed us to identify this most recent cypress logging operation.

## Wood Pellets

### Drax and ABK Partnership

In an effort to protect our cypress/tupelo swamps and our native broadleaf forests, Drax and ABK created and signed the following commitment agreement in 2016:

- ✓ *Built on credible commitments*
- ✓ *Designed to protect Louisiana's natural treasures and promote sustainable growth in the biomass industry*

1. Drax Biomass will use southern yellow pine as the primary source material for wood pellets manufactured at its facilities.

2. Drax Biomass will not source cypress or tupelo for use in wood pellets manufacturing.

3. Drax Biomass will not source material from land that is being converted from natural hardwood forest to plantation or from land that has undergone such conversion since 2008.

4. Drax Biomass will not source material from wetlands that are being drained or otherwise converted into non-wetland uses, even if the impacted wetlands are mitigated.

5. Drax Biomass will regularly work with the Atchafalaya Basinkeeper and other interested stakeholders to identify ecologically important areas within its supply base.

Though Drax Biomass is a foreign company, it has nonetheless recognized the importance of the Atchafalaya Basin and our cypress/tupelo forests as a unique and irreplaceable treasure to humanity. In response, Drax is voluntarily moving away from sourcing wood from cypress/tupelo swamps. After years of attempts to work with our agencies, the Louisiana Forestry Association and the Louisiana Landowners Association, working with Drax has been inspiring, productive, and has instilled renewed hope in the efficacy of future cooperation from industry. Furthermore, we are hopeful that this commitment will influence timber industry standards across the board.

## German Pellets

In 2015 German Pellets went bankrupt and the plant was purchased by Drax Biomass, which will follow its agreed-upon commitments to sustainability.

## Highland Pellets

Early in 2017, Dean, with Atchafalaya Basinkeeper, and Woody Martin, with Sierra Club Delta Chapter, traveled to Pine Bluff, Arkansas, to meet with the wood-pellet company Highland Pellets. Highland Pellets will be sourcing their wood in southern Arkansas and northern Louisiana. The owners of Highland Pellets have adopted the same sustainability standards as Drax in an effort to protect our forests. This movement is what we hoped to see reflected across industry standards after our commitment with Drax Biomass. Our children and their future first, profits second.

## Legal Actions

ABK is immensely grateful for the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic (New Orleans), which offers tremendous support to ABK with their legal pursuits, and has done so consistently for several years. We are also very grateful for all the hard work and assistance provided by attorney Buzzy Joy from Joseph Joy & Associates, attorney David Brown, and our new staff attorney Misha Mitchell.

It is only after exhausting all other possibilities that ABK takes legal action, an act of last resort and always a sign of failure by our state and federal agencies to uphold their obligations to enforce our environmental laws and to protect the best interests of the public and the nation. Before any legal action is taken, ABK goes to great lengths to investigate the situation, to report the violations, and to do whatever is in our power to help our agencies do their jobs effectively.

## Bayou Postillion

A jury ruled in favor of Atchafalaya Basinkeeper Trustee Dan Collins in his whistleblower lawsuit against the State of Louisiana. Instead of adequately investigating the corruption Dan presented in the case, the First Circuit reversed their own opinion from 2013, which brought the case to trial. The Court held that the jury was manifestly erroneous in concluding that Collins was an employee (even though the jury was unanimous on that finding).

The First Circuit did not address the facts of the case regarding what occurred with the environmental violations. The ONLY issue that was addressed regarded whether or not Collins was an employee, in an effort to dispute his standing, a threshold issue.

These environmental violations in the Basin are still going unchecked with no state or federal investigation. This is seven years after the suit was filed and later obtained a favorable jury verdict. Now that verdict has been overturned.

## Illegal Roads and Dams Along I-10

ABK and LCPA-West sued the Corps for unlawfully issuing a permit to legitimize the illegally-built roads and dams on wetlands protected by environmental easements. The judge ruled against us, and ABK appealed this decision. Unfortunately, due to procedural deficiencies, our appeal was denied.

## Challenge to General Permit NOD-13

Victory! In 2015, Atchafalaya Basinkeeper, Gulf Restoration Network, and LCPA-West, represented by the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic, challenged general permit NOD-13 (now GP-13) in court. GP-13 has served as the basis for authorizing activities resulting in irreparable harm in the Basin. GP-13 protects environmental criminals from our legal actions, avoiding comments by the public and other agencies.

The case against the Corps was settled out of court, after the Corps agreed to include the following exclusion in GP-13: *Exclusion "k." was added to exclude the use of GP-13 for projects located within the Atchafalaya Basin.*

This permit has previously served as the basis for authorized activities resulting in irreparable harm in the Basin. By excluding the Atchafalaya Basin altogether from permits under GP-13, Basinkeeper and its comrades have assured application of individual permits providing opportunities for public notice and comment prior to authorization of this manner of activities in our watershed.

The case is closed, settlement papers signed, and the comment period for the proposed permit modifications is now complete. We now await the publication of the modified permit language in the federal register (anticipated to be on or around July 1, 2017).

This is a HUGE victory for ABK and the other NGOs who supported us in this case. Our thanks and congratulations go out to all the groups who have worked so hard to make this success possible. We anxiously await final publication.

## **Fisher Lake Lawsuits**

In 2010, ABK together with LCPA-West, took legal action against an illegal developer in the Basin after multiple failed attempts to engage the Corps to take action. The Corps responded by conducting an evaluation based on the developer's own incorrect data to justify the permit and granting an after-the-fact permit to the developer. ABK complained to the head of the Corps' permitting department, without redress. Next, Atchafalaya Basinkeeper, LCPA-West, and LEAN, represented by the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic, filed suit against the Corps, challenging the Corps' issuance of the after-the-fact permits for development of Atchafalaya Basin wetlands. By issuing after-the-fact permits the Corps encourages destructive behavior, sending the message that it is easier to seek forgiveness than permission and meaningful public comment. Such permits allow developers to avoid environmental assessments, encouraging the degradation of wetlands, precious and endangered natural resources that are critical to the livelihood and culture of many Louisianans.

The challenged permits purport to validate prior unpermitted activity. Seeking to replace natural wetlands with a private duck pond, developers dug a ditch more than two miles long through wetlands, drained the water out of a lake, and installed a dam and metal water-control devices to artificially control the flow and level of water—all without obtaining permits required by the Clean Water Act. These actions alter the hydrology of over 700 acres of lake and forested hardwood swamp in the Atchafalaya Basin in an area formerly designated as critical habitat for the Louisiana black bear, while blocking access to the area by sport and commercial fishermen. By granting after-the-fact permits, the Corps dismisses the Clean Water Act and rationalizes the unpermitted actions of the developers.

The same landowner filled Bayou Cane with dirt and the Corps, again, refused to take action against the landowner. The Corps also granted another permit, this time a General Permit, for the illegal developers to expand the dam. The illegal developers also made an elevated road without a permit, which has been completely ignored by the Corps.

The Fisher Lake lawsuit against the Corps for giving after-the-fact permits to environmental offenders is ongoing. The lawsuit against the landowner for damming and dredging Bayou Cane and draining Fisher Lake without a permit is still pending.

## **Privatizing our Waterways**

The next big push by Louisiana's major landowners is privatizing our waterways. Gates, plugs, and dams are being built all over coastal Louisiana blocking public access to public waters. The Corps wrote a Cease & Desist order on the gate that was built across Beaver Slough; however, the gate was never removed.

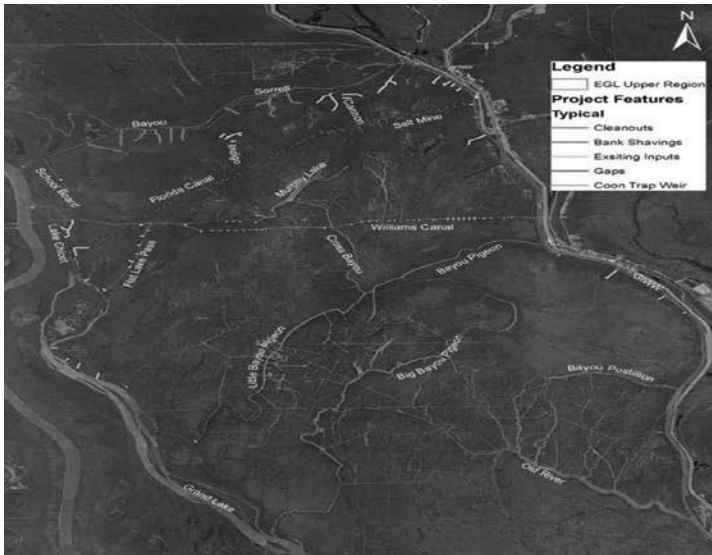
The Corps also granted a permit to S.M. Energy to build plugs/dams on four natural streams to block public access to an area within the Atchafalaya Delta. The permit in the growing delta of the Atchafalaya River was granted in the name of coastal restoration despite ABK's exposing the untruths of S.M. Energy by sending the Corps a timeframe of satellite pictures showing massive accretion in the area. Sadly, ABK does not have the resources to fight every fight and, at this time, we will not be able to challenge this permit.

## **DNR & The Nature Conservancy – A Partnership that Threatens the Basin**

The East Grand Lake (EGL) project, a proposal of the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources' Atchafalaya Basin Program, will rapidly fill with sediments hundreds, if not thousands, of acres of swamps, lakes, and streams, forever destroying those unique wetlands and lush habitat.

Excessive sedimentation is by far the greatest threat to the health, integrity, and future of the Basin's swamps. About 75% of all our swamps, lakes, and bayous have already been lost due to excessive sediments. Though some slight and gradual sedimentation can be a natural process, the Basin takes in an immense sediment load diverted to its waters, in a most unnatural and anthropogenic process which has resulted in filling many of our lakes, bayous, and swamps in just a few years' time. Years of unrestricted, noncompliant oil development, coupled with the Corps' attempts to control the natural processes in manipulating flow and boundaries, has led to this increased accretion in the Basin.

For years, powerful Atchafalaya Basin landowners behind the scenes have fought to divert public funds for projects that embrace their interests, including projects aimed at facilitating oil and gas access, blocking access by the public to public waters and diverting river sediments to transform our Basin's wetlands into uplands. Bayou Postillion, Brown Bayou, and the East Grand Lake are examples of projects, proposed and designed behind the scenes by landowners in the Basin, and implemented by the Department of Natural Resources' (LDNR) Atchafalaya Basin Program as "water quality" projects.



East Grand Lake Project



Occurring accretion in the East Grand Lake Area. Notice the deltas forming from pipeline canals at each cut into the swamps.

Today, the Nature Conservancy (TNC), with funds from Shell Oil and undisclosed "others", is working to revive LDNR's East Grand Lake (EGL) project. The pertinent facts about the project are as follows:

The EGL project was created years ago to distribute sediments into the East Grand Lake area. The project was originally designed by the US Fish & Wildlife Service and an influential landowner (and maybe others) as a compromise to temporarily increase crawfish productivity in the Basin by diverting sediment-laden river water into the East Grand Lake area. The resulting, temporarily improved water flow and quality would please some commercial fishermen; meanwhile, the introduced sediment water will eventually transform the swamps into uplands, benefitting a few large landowners. The publicly stated "purpose" of the EGL project is to augment north-south water flow, improve water quality, and distribute sediments in the area through a series of cuts. The project is thus presented as means to satisfy the needs of the commercial fishermen (temporarily) and, ultimately, the landowners. ABK, Sierra Club, and LCPA-West have actively opposed this and other similar projects, since they were first presented by the US Fish & Wildlife Service in 2009-2010. These groups immediately recognized the potential danger in these projects' design. As proposed, these projects assure the quick destruction of the lakes, bayous, and swamps in the Atchafalaya Basin through accelerated sedimentation.

The EGL project is not based on sound science, contrary to what TNC has assured the agencies, legislators, and the public. This project was previously developed, and TNC is trying to create and manipulate scientific data that will support the project's aims. Despite requests from concerned citizens, partner groups, and ABK, LDNR and TNC have repeatedly failed to provide scientific proof that the swamps, lakes, and bayous will not fill with sediment and be lost forever if the project receives full legislative and permit approval.



## Who are the Key Players Behind the Project?

The project is a product of the influence of the powerful landowners in the Basin. Both TNC and LDNR stated that they will develop projects with the “vision of the landowners in the forefront.”

Brian Piazza, the key scientist with TNC working to provide “scientific” justification for the project, stated in an October 2015 article by GCPOLCC that: “We [TNC] are working closely with Louisiana’s Atchafalaya Basin Program to implement the East Grand Lake Restoration Project, something that has been in their annual plan since 2012. This will be the first example of a partnership between landowners and the Basin Program that is focused on building a restoration project, and we hope this is the first of many.”

Jim Bergan, director of fresh water and wetland conservation for TNC, made the following statement: “This is just the beginning . . . We’re hopeful that a lot of folks are going to say if The Nature Conservancy is working with Wilbert’s and Wilbert’s is working with The Nature Conservancy, it’s got to be a positive thing. Gaining the trust of private land owners is key, because the vast majority of the Atchafalaya Basin is privately owned. But The Nature Conservancy is hopeful this deal with Wilbert’s will be a model for future projects.” WRKF 89.3 July 21, 2015.

## What is the “Landowner Vision” for the Future of the Atchafalaya Basin?

It all comes down to financial profit and exclusion of the public from these resources. The landowner interests include: enhancing oil access, blocking public access, logging cypress trees, and creation of uplands to avoid development restrictions, thus increasing property value. Most egregious is that TNC has fabricated the conditions of the Basin to justify the project. It asserts that cypress trees are dying to such an extent that the project is necessary to improve the sheet flow and divert sediments to the area and the trees’ habitat. Cypress trees in the project area are not dying, in fact, all signs point to the contrary. When ABK confronted TNC about this fact, TNC refused to produce evidence of dying trees. Since ABK has begun to unravel the untruths of these assertions, TNC has been taking people to a small area where cypress trees died as a result of an illegal discharge of industrial produced waters, asserting that the trees died because there is too much water. Meanwhile, Don Haydel, head of the

LDNR Atchafalaya Basin Program, has forbidden any of his employees from visiting the sites with ABK to talk about the project. lues and expelling commercial fishermen and the public.

There are three main landowners that will benefit by creating uplands out of these swamps. One of them, A. Wilbert’s Sons, has already harvested and destroyed hundreds of acres of cypress swamps in the Basin. The second main landowner was logging cypress swamps just last fall, and the third landowner stated that they want the accretion so “they can manage their timber.”



This image shows the result of logging operations by one of the landowners Photo taken in the Fall 2016. This is the “landowner vision for the Atchafalaya Basin.”

In an article from The Advocate (Baton Rouge) on July 8, 2015:

“For A. Wilbert’s Sons LLC, the company that owns and manages a total of 125,000 acres for stockholders, the sale is a good one for the company and a good fit for how they want to see the land maintained. ‘We wanted to sell it to someone who thought of the property like we did. Not to preserve but to conserve,’ said Vic Blanchard, land manager at A. Wilbert’s Sons.”

Not only has A. Wilbert’s Sons cut down hundreds of acres of swamps, but they allowed an oil company to dam Brown Bayou, East Branch of Bayou des Glaisses, Bristow Bayou, and other waterways, negatively impacting water quality to hundreds of acres of swamps. ABK and LCPA-West had to send a Notice of Intent to sue to prevent them from damming the East Branch of Brown Bayou and to address the unpermitted damming of several waterways along I-10.

## Status of the East Grand Lake Project

The project is moving forward despite 100% opposition by fishermen present at both the Bayou Sorrel and Henderson public hearing. Despite ABK's well-intentioned attempts to work with TNC, our efforts have been fruitless. ABK sent a letter to LDNR asking to be a part of TNC and LDNR's Memorandum of Understanding, to be a partner in the development of those projects, but LDNR denied our request, instead merely "inviting" us to participate during the comment period (required by law). Meanwhile, the responsible parties continue to put landowner vision in the forefront in designing those projects. ABK and LCPA-West commented against the project in front of the Atchafalaya Basin Program Research and Promotion Board; however, they unanimously voted to approve the project, refusing to even look at our facts.

The Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) voted to approve the project after they twice refused to even look at the facts we wanted to present and denied ABK and LCPA-West's requests to be included in their agenda to present evidence to the board. CPRA is expending millions of dollars restoring bird habitat along the coast but at the same time is allowing projects like this one to destroy established and irreplaceable bird habitat away from the coast, using sediments that are desperately needed along the coast to fill up the most productive swamp in the world. One of CPRA's projects, the Queen Bess Project, will expend nearly \$600,000.00 per acre to restore an island in Barataria Bay owned by an oil company. ABK and LCPA-West have video footage showing tens of thousands of birds using the East Grand Lake area for migratory bird habitat, the same area the project will destroyed, but CPRA refused to look at the video.

The Louisiana Senate Natural Resources Committee unanimously approved the project. For the first time, TNC managed to get some support for the project from a few commercial fishermen. TNC presented cards in support from those fishermen to the senators. None of the fishermen were present in the committee session to present their cards or speak in favor. In fact, many of those fishermen sell to a crawfish buyer, the main individual pushing for commercial fishermen support for the project, and a very close friend of Vic Blanchard with A. Wilbert's Sons.

ABK, LCPA-West, and Delta Chapter of the Sierra Club sent a letter of complaint to Governor Edwards that he has yet to answer. Senator Fred Mills sent another letter of complaint to Governor Edwards. No response from the governor's office has been received.

In all of ABK's years working to protect the Basin we have never witnessed such unethical behavior by an environmental group as we are presently experiencing with TNC. **The East Grand Lake project, and others like it, are the greatest threats the Basin has ever encountered, endangering the future of the Atchafalaya Basin, and all Louisiana's cities and communities that depend on the Basin for flood protection. Stopping this project and any similar projects will be ABK's top priority.**

Not only are projects like this one unethical, they are criminal. As the Basin fills in with sediment, its capacity to absorb floodwaters becomes severely diminished, putting entire communities in coastal Louisiana at risk from flooding, and endangering the entire region, from Lafayette to Baton Rouge, and from Morgan City to New Orleans.

You can help by calling your senator, your representative, Governor Edwards, and our congressional delegation demanding him/her to put a stop to the project ASAP and to invest in science aimed at how we can better protect the Basin's swamps and increase the Basin's productivity without destroying it, and condemning the creation of pseudoscience to justify its destruction.

## Education & Outreach

We are invested in educating today's advocates, as well as the next generation of environmental stewards in Louisiana. In 2016-17, ABK directly connected with over 2,000 people through PowerPoint presentations, paddling trips, swamp tours, workshops, and meetings. We work with civic groups, school groups, and outdoor groups for children; bring people out into the Atchafalaya Basin to learn the importance of its ecology, history, culture, and threats; and apply the Clean Water Act and the Rivers and Harbors Act to protect wetlands.

**“The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit.”**

-Nelson Henderson

We are so very grateful that our love for the Basin and desire to protect it brings us together with so many friends, supporters, and members across the globe! Behind ABK's every action is the drive to prevent this natural wonder from being lost, so that future generations can enjoy its breathtaking beauty, and thrive from the generous bounty of resources which we have been so fortuitous to inherit. Our endless gratitude goes out to all of you who have empowered us to be the Basin's protectors, and without whom we would not exist. Our victories are yours.

### **How Can You Help?**

- Don't buy cypress mulch!
- Renew your membership, donate, and attend events.
- Become a Business Sponsor. The way you spend your money can make a big difference.
- Spread the word. Talk about the issues.
- Encourage others to join ABK in the fight to save the Basin.
- Invite Basinkeeper to do a presentation for your organization, civic group, school, or university.
- Don't support businesses that use or sell cypress mulch.
- Volunteer.
- Report possible violations in Atchafalaya wetlands and waterways by calling: 225-685-9439.

### **Become a Member or a Sponsor**

Join or sponsor us online at: [www.basinkeeper.org](http://www.basinkeeper.org)  
Send your check or money order to:  
Atchafalaya Basinkeeper  
P.O. Box 410 Plaquemine, LA 70765

### **Thank You, Basinkeeper 2016 Business Sponsors!**

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### **Thank you for your support!**

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### **Atchafalaya Basinkeeper Staff**

- Dean A. Wilson, Atchafalaya Basinkeeper & Executive Director
- Misha Mitchell, Staff Attorney
- Katherine Barney, Development Director

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