

# *Atchafalaya Basin Floodway*

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## *Summary*

The Atchafalaya Basin Floodway is one of the last great wildernesses remaining in the continental United States identified by the United States Corps of Engineers, USACE. The Atchafalaya Basin in Southern Louisiana includes the largest contiguous wetlands in the Mississippi River Valley. The Basin includes 10 distinct aquatic & terrestrial habitats ranging from large rivers to backwater swamps. The Basin is most noted for its Cypress-Tupelo Gum swamp habitat and its Cajun heritage.

## *Vision Statement of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway*

Future visitors and residents of the Atchafalaya Basin will encounter a landscape where natural processes are operating on a grand scale with humans moderating their activities so that they have become less intrusive and a reasonable part of, rather than an encumbrance upon, these processes;

Where the built and natural environments are visually attractive, the object of intense human enjoyment, and manifest the qualities of scenic beauty and aesthetic harmony;

Where the photogenic panoramas and vistas of the region will exhibit more than static post card images, but rather a truly dynamic landscape, as in ages past, constantly changing and evolving; forests in various states of succession, seasonal flooding and other natural disturbances; soil erosion and deposition; the minimum necessary control of waterways and unpolluted lakes;

Where in these grand settings, ecological processes will be apparent in all scales, from the geological time frame of river course changes and land formation to the moment-to-moment pace of life in a bird rookery;

Where human institutions are re-oriented toward a stewardship approach to the region's diverse resource processes, patterns, qualities, uses and values;

Where a diversity of livelihoods will continue, commercial fishing, timber harvesting, oil & gas extraction, all activities done in harmony with, and sensitive to, other resource values and land uses;

Where people regard the Atchafalaya ecosystem as a single, complex organism and are working together in concert with widespread public support to plan, manage and interpret the region's intrinsic (natural) and extrinsic (man-made) resources as a unified whole;

Where the overriding mood of the Atchafalaya will be a harmonious balance between naturalness and unimpaired ecological processes, and the enlightened and unobtrusive use of the land for needed economic and social purposes;

Where, complementing that mood, educational opportunities abound and where the Atchafalaya has become a world model – a showcase of visionary planning and progressive management of public & private resources, and cooperation among many agencies, groups and individuals to achieve goals.

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*One of the last great wildernesses remaining in the United States.*

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## *Fact Sheet*

- Located between Baton Rouge, Louisiana to the east & Lafayette, Louisiana to the west
- More than 1 million acres in size, comprising the largest floodway in North America
- Consists of three floodways: Morganza Floodway, West Atchafalaya Floodway & Atchafalaya Basin Floodway
- Largest river swamp in North America, 173,000 acres of cypress swamps and 64,000 acres of aquatic habitat. 18,000 acres are under the jurisdiction of the State Land Office, 37,280 acres are managed by the Department of Wildlife & Fisheries, 15,220 acres are owned by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Atchafalaya National Wildlife Refuge), 36,000 acres are owned by the Corps of Engineers and 40% is owned by private landowners
- Home to nine Federal and State listed endangered/threatened wildlife species
- Over 170 bird species located in the basin
- Important wintering grounds for the birds of the Mississippi Flyway
- Major wintering concentration of wood ducks, mallards and woodcocks
- Largest contiguous bottomland hardwood forest for forest interior nesting species
- Highest nest production for Louisiana species
- Home to six endangered/threatened species of birds and 29 rookeries
- Diversity of wetlands, 500,000 acres of hydric soils, provide habitat for 14 wading bird rookeries
- Home to numerous bald eagle nests
- More than 50 mammalian species
- More than 40 reptilian and 20 amphibian species
- More than 100 species of fin fish and shellfish
- The Atchafalaya River is one of the top five rivers in discharge in the United States; average annual flow is 180,000 cubic feet per second
- The projected flood flow is 1.5 million cubic feet per second
- Most active growing delta (land accretion) in the continental United States
- Website - [www.dnr.state.la.us](http://www.dnr.state.la.us)
- 225-342-6437
- The State of Louisiana Department of Natural Resources Atchafalaya Basin Program coordinates the Atchafalaya Basin Advisory Committee and supervises the implementation of the Atchafalaya Basin State Master Plan

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## *Economics*

- Produces over \$123 million annually from recreational activities
- Nature study averages 49,000 hours per year
- Produces \$5 - \$6 million annually from commercial fishing & crawfishing
- Produces more than 1000 pounds of fin fish per acre in certain water bodies in the lower Basin - greater than any reservoir in the Southeastern United States
- More than 500,000 user days of sport fishing recreational activity each year - over 8000 hours per month in just a 17 square mile area which is only 2% of the basin
- More than 164,000 user days of hunting activity each year
- Deer hunters on the Sherburne Wildlife Management Area/ Atchafalaya National Wildlife Refuge contributed over \$1 million to the state's economy
- 25% of Louisiana's commercial forest lands and 51% of the state's hardwood forest are located in the basin
- Vital oil & gas pipelines cross the basin
- More than 300 active oil & gas wells are located in the basin
- Atchafalaya River is a vital port for the oil & gas industries in the Gulf of Mexico
- More vessels pass Morgan City annually than Baton Rouge, the sixth largest port in the country

## *Flood Control*

- Important component of the USACE Mississippi River and Tributaries Flood Control Project
- As part of Project Flood, 1.5 million cubic feet of water is routed down the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway
- Designed flood for the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System would fill the Superdome in one minute and the City of New Orleans to a depth of 8 feet in less than 12 hours

## *Culture*

- Important in the development of unique cultures of Acadian & Native Americans
- Location of several hundred archeological sites, including several prehistoric sites