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Board may reconsider Basin logging contract

by Henri C. Bienvenu

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Dean Wilson

Breaux Bridge – At least some members of the St. Martin School Board last week indicated a willingness to try and modify a contract awarded to allow logging of 16th Section land the parish owns in the Atchafalaya Basin.

At the urging of District 5 representative Russell Foti the board asked staff member Allen Blanchard to approach Good Home Timber, the company that won the contract that was awarded last December, to see if some of the terms could be modified.

They asked Blanchard to also determine how much it might cost the board, in both possible legal expenses and lost revenue, to modify the lease, if the company is agreeable.

At its Dec. 7 meeting the board awarded a contract to Good Home to harvest trees from the property, located southeast of the Butte La Rose landing. The company will pay the school system \$98,500 for the timber rights.

Since then preservation groups concerned about the loss of cypress stands on the site have appealed to the board to void the contract.

Basin Keeper Dean Wilson made a presentation at the board's March 7 meeting calling attention to the natural beauty of the swampy area and the likely loss of a scenic lake and its native cypress trees.

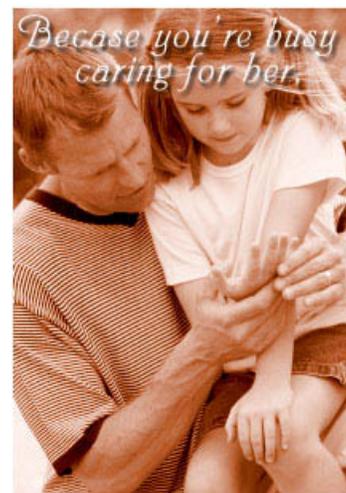
And last week author/photographer Greg Guirard of Catahoula made a passionate plea for the board to reconsider its action.

He recalled how the Basin's massive cypress forests were harvested for lumber in the early 20th century, destroying trees that were hundreds of years old.

"I think it would be a tragedy" to allow the harvest of the small cypress trees on the school board property, he told board members. He said there was a possibility the board could offset the loss of the \$98,000 contract by selling an environmental easement on the property, by promoting "ecotours" for visitors eager to see the birds and other wildlife, and by possibly selling carbon credits on the property.

"I hope you have the wisdom to go back on this contract," he pleaded.

Also urging the voiding of the contract was Sara Nau with the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic. She warned board members of possible legal, financial and environmental repercussions if the contract is carried out.



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"This is a rare and unique ecosystem," she said. And she claimed the contract, as written, "is null and void," contending that the 237-acre cypress lake located in the 640-acre section is a "water bottom" that is protected under a law that says only the state can award contracts affecting water bottoms.

But board attorney Mark Boyer refuted the claim, pointing out that the lake "is not a navigable waterway, so the law doesn't apply."

He also reminded the board that the contract provides for a certified forester to assure that the company follows good forestry practices in its logging operations.

"I think you would certainly face legal consequences if you tried to back out of the contract," he added.

Superintendent Richard Lavergne told board members that he had been in touch with Good Home representatives and "they may be open to renegotiation. But it probably will cost us some money to redo the contract. It would probably require another survey be made of the property," he said.

Board members asked Blanchard to have a report ready for the May 2 meeting.

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Considering that not selling the trees will place the burden of the school deficit on the Taxpayers, Bubba Basinkeeper and his Leftist-Socialist Treehuggers are welcome to bid more than \$98,500.00 of THEIR MONEY to RENT those trees for the average period of time it takes to grow replacements. Of coarse, they're not interested in using THEIR MONEY. They're interested in using YOURS!!!

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Carla. | May 08, 2012

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