

Bayou Pierre – Everyone’s concern

Bayou Pierre – when the bayou is mentioned the first thing that comes to mind is usually hunting (hogs, mainly) or riding four-wheelers or picnicking on the sandbar.

Ask the landowners around Bayou Pierre and you get a whole different description. It’s their livelihood. Timber, livestock, crops. All need the Bayou Pierre watershed (A watershed is the area of land where all of the water that is under it or drains off of it goes into the same place.)

Daniel J. Drennen, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, noted that Bayou Pierre is “a gem in the rough for Copeiah County.” Mr. Drennen and Bill Russell, NRCS, led the group meeting at the Copeiah County Fairgrounds Multi-Purpose Building recently to bring together all the agencies and landowners interested to see what could be done for a long-term “healing” of the bayou that would be beneficial to both the landowners and the ecosystem.

A request was made to those in attendance for input about what is needed to save the bayou. Copeiah County is doing fairly well in the reclamation area, but help is still needed to keep erosion to a minimum. Mr. Drennen stated, the group “should work together for a better watershed where the whole county could be proud.”

A statement was made about rain influencing the bayou. When one area gets two inches of rain, it’s not really noticed. When that two inches gets to Bayou Pierre, it turns into a major erosion problem. As one landowner said, “A little rain over there becomes a major problem for Bayou Pierre.”

Bill Russell, Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA, pointed out that he has seen eight acres of trees planted on the bayou gone in a short time, all because of erosion. In Copeiah County, less than 50 percent of



water drains into Bayou Pierre; Claiborne County is more than 50 percent. One of the Claiborne County commissioners commented, “Claiborne soil melts like sugar.” Bayou Pierre covers approximately 230,000 acres.

One county landowner stated he had lost 30-50 acres in five years, and “it’s time to do something.” Mr. Russell stated that they “can’t fix everything, but we are utilizing everything we can.”

Another issue faced is absentee landowners who don’t know this is happening. If the bayou goes through their property, little can be done in that area without direct contact with the landowner.

Roads and bridges are also affected by the situation, as two bridges were mentioned as having erosion problems recently. Also a property on Old Port Gibson Road was finally fixed when the erosion was endangering a county road and the county fixed it.

Matthew Hicks, Geologist with USGS has had personal experience with the bayou. He said you can’t understand unless you’ve seen it personally. The USGS is developing monitoring plans to measure effectiveness and progress. Scientific data helps to see results and can have more impact when used to apply for grants. As the map Mr. Hicks showed, nothing



Daniel Drennen



Bill Russell

is going on in southwest Mississippi as far as the geologic surveying is going. Bayou Pierre is ripe for studies. Collection and interpretation of ecological and environmental data would go far in presenting needs.

The reason this meeting was put together was to get the organizations in touch with the landowners and county commissioners to form an organization that will be recognized by the

“powers that be” so funds can be allocated to help landowners work on their erosion problems.

So many studies and facts need to be put together to present a good prospectus to present to agencies who have the money to help with the projects. This will have to be a 20-30 year plan with emphasis on the ecosystem and feasibility studies.

Discussion then turned to the Bayou Darter who was listed in 1975 as a threatened species. The fish is found nowhere but Mississippi, in Bayou Pierre and its tributaries: White Oak Creek, Foster Creek and Turkey Creek in Copeiah, Claiborne and Hinds counties.

The darter prefers stable gravel riffles or sandstone exposures with large sized gravel and rocks. The erosion on Bayou Pierre is destroying the habitat of the darter. No darters have been found on Little Bayou Pierre, however, the areas where the darter is found seem to be changing as the bayou changes.

Matt Roberts, MMNS, stated, “Fish don’t like sediment. It fills in the spaces between gravel and kills the darter’s food.” The highest density of the darter is in an area upstream of Smyrna bridge.

Stephen Ricks, Field Supervisor, F&WS, told the group, this has to be a vision. “Funding is not the issue, vision is. You all have a lot to lose.”

Numerous agencies were represented at the meeting, including EPA, MDOC, NRCS, F&WS, DEQ, and Corps of Engineers as well as commissioners from Copeiah and Claiborne counties.

For more information on this subject or how you can become involved, contact Daniel Drennen at daniel_drennen@fws.gov, and office phone number down ; 601-321-1127