

FALSE RIVER



ADVOCATE FILE PHOTO

A family's boat sits docked in 2014 at a launch near Morel's Restaurant on False River in New Roads.

Residents may face future limitations

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Hoping to improve water quality in False River, Pointe Coupee Parish leaders are exploring regulating how retaining walls and erosion prevention structures along the oxbow lake's shorelines are built.

The Police Jury on Tuesday is set to take up a proposal that, if approved, would put in place a permit-issuing process for property owners living along False River who want to build such structures. The measure is only on the agenda for introduction and would not go to a vote until

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after a public hearing is held, likely in July.

Supporters say managing the construction of retaining walls will help in ongoing efforts to improve the water quality of the lake. The proposed permit process would also cut down the number of structure failures, which have been happening with greater frequency since the parish has instituted annual drawdowns of the lake's water level.

"Right now, contractors are just building whatever they think is safe," Juror Kyle Olinde said. "It seems like they've been failing far too often lately."

Retaining walls, also referred to as bulkheads, are man-made barriers that prevent erosion for waterfront properties. They allow property owners more land to erect such things as boat launches on the water's edge.

The recent issues with failing

bulkheads had parish leaders locked in tense debate with the owners of waterfront properties who said their structures were failing in 2015 because of a man-induced drawdown designed to improve water quality.

But an engineering expert who inspected the reported failures two years ago cited faulty construction as the reason for the bulkhead issues.

"When these walls fail, dirt and other materials wash down into the water, muddying up the lake and stirring up sediments," Olinde said.

A state-driven effort to improve False River has been going on for the past four years. The oxbow lake was on a 20-year decline mostly attributed to heavy silt buildup at the bottom of the lake which impeded vegetation growth and disrupted fish-spawning habitats.

The proposed guidelines wouldn't apply to property owners who have bulkheads on their properties. But any new construction or repairs a property

owner makes to their retaining wall in the future would be subject to the new requirements.

According to the proposed amendments obtained by The Advocate, the parish hopes to regulate bulkheads construction by first ensuring that the materials used meet the requirements of the state's Water Control Law and conform with the Federal Water Pollution Control Act and federal water quality standards.

Property owners would have to submit applications for a bulkhead permit from the parish in addition to any other permits they must secure from any federal, state and/or local agency, the proposed amendments state. Permit applications must include design plans and specifications describing the project and there will be a \$250 processing fee.

However, if a property owner is using natural materials (like dirt and rocks) to build an erosion wall, engineered plans are not required for a permit application.

Anyone in violation of the proposed amendments would face up to \$500 in fines and up to 30 days in jail.

"We've spent about two years on this, looked at what a lot of other municipalities and water board commissions have in place regarding this," state Rep. Major Thibaut, D-New Roads, said. "The river bank here is about 80 percent bulkheads, and that's not good for the turbidity of the lake."

"We're trying to reduce the amount of erosion and waves ping-ponging back and forth which stirs up all the silt and having an adverse effect on plant life," he said.

The Police Jury is expected to set a public hearing on the amendments at Tuesday's meeting. That hearing likely will take place in July.

"It's going to be a little more costly for them, but they're going to have a better job in the end," Olinde said

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