

The proposed lake project is cited as a reason to select Alternative 4, but this project is simply being talked about and far from being a future reality. Where's the money? Louisiana struggles each year to find money to support the essentials required by Government. Proponents say the nearby Interstate would boost a retirement colony around the lakes. Lake Claiborne, east of Homer, has been a success without an Interstate Highway nearby. An Interstate is not needed to go to the Lakes!

As a resident of the Leton/Blackburn Community most of my life, I can't see that an Interchange on LA 2 would serve much purpose as the traffic is mostly log trucks, a few tanker transports, local oil field traffic, etc. The population is sparse in this area and there is no established community or businesses to serve and it is highly unlikely any development will occur here.

A display of the Lakes Project indicates that Alternative 4 would cross a proposed lake on Black Bayou. This would seem to be a very costly area with a bridge addition, extra engineering, surveying, length and height of bridge to be determined. Co-ordination with local, state and federal agencies would be a tremendous task.

If Alternative 4 is selected, I highly recommend an Interchange be built on the I-69/LA 159 crossing to provide access for the Evergreen Community. There is a rehab hospital (Community Specialty Hospital of North LA) and a youth facility (Hope Youth Ranch) located in the Community that generates a lot of traffic by employees, transportation of patients, deliveries of support goods, visitors and relatives.

In summation, Alternative 5, Option 1, would best suit the local needs of North Louisiana residents. My reasons are as follows:

- 1. Provide economic opportunities for existing communities along corridor.*
- 2. Improve mobility and safety of travel between towns/cities along the area by private auto and commercial vehicles.*
- 3. Promote regional economic development in North La. Area.*

Sachan

Alice Stewart
550 Harmon Loop
Homer, LA 71040
May 23, 2005

Comment #4676
Attachment
7A

Mr. Kent Dussom, Senior Project Manager
URS Corporation
Executive Tower
3500 North Causeway Boulevard, Suite 900
Metairie, Louisiana 70002-3527

RE: I-69 Corridor - SIU #14

Dear Mr. Dussom,

As chairman of the Claiborne Parish Watershed District, which has statutory responsibility to protect and develop the natural resources of our parish in the public interest, I greatly appreciate the detailed information in the I-69 SIU #14 Draft Environmental Impact Study (DEIS), and I hope that you will provide a copy of the study to our commission. Thank you.

The Natural Resources section of the study is most illuminating. It is exactly the kind of pooled and analyzed information that we need at the parish, regional, and state levels to make wise decisions in charting the course for our future.

I respect your economic development considerations as perhaps the best that could be achieved given your information. But the report that the "North Hills Lakes Project" is about injection wells illustrates the extent of communication failure. The project is not about any single lake, not even about lake development in general, and, most of all, not about injection wells. In fact, "North Hills Lakes Project" is a misnomer. Dr. Michael carefully chose the name "Water Resources and Scenic Attractions in North Louisiana's Sparta Area."

The project that Dr. Michael leads is at heart a regional plan for economic development that requires and thus promotes preservation of rural natural resources. I was present at a meeting in 2003 in the office of President of Louisiana Tech Dan Reneau when Dr. Michael discussed the project with Dr. Reneau, La Tech Architecture Department staff, and the chairman of the Engineering Department. There was great enthusiasm for a multi-disciplinary effort to draw up a plan for economic development that restores the region's natural resources and capitalizes on its natural beauty. Mention was made of many topics addressed by the DEIS 'Natural Resources' document - for example, the need to avoid segmenting currently unperturbed areas of nature and to preserve customary paths used by wildlife. La Tech staff spoke of the need to promote best management forestry practices and to consult sociologists to assure that development serves economically disadvantaged citizens. Communities thrive that integrate economic and environmental interests and deteriorate when they do not. The north Louisiana development project should be reinforced at every opportunity.

Many elements must fall into place for the regional plan to succeed. The timing for the I-69 route decision is now. A strategic I-69 route can be very instrumental, and possibly critical, for development of north central Louisiana. DEIS reports that Alternative 5 is "most central" to the Rural Renewal Zone, but actually Dr. Michael's proposed "Straight Route" is most central, and even Alternative 4, with a second interchange in Claiborne Parish, is more central. Louisiana cannot afford not to capitalize on this region's assets.

Thank you for considering the many important factors that come into play with the I-69 route decision.

Sincerely,

Alice Stewart

Alice Stewart
copy to Mr. Scott Hoffeld, Mrs. Christie Wilson

Arguments in Support of Alternative 4 (Options 2 & 3)

Comment 4676
Attachment
7B

1. Dorcheat.

DEIS leaves little doubt that Alternative 4 provides the preferable Dorcheat crossing in terms of preserving the river's scenic beauty, its recreational qualities, and the reputation of the region as a 'Sportsman's Paradise.'

2. Aquifer Recharge.

DEIS makes clear that Alternative 4 involves less of the combined Sparta recharge and North Louisiana Terrace aquifer area. In terms of water quality, while spills are considered unlikely, the detriment of a spill would be sufficiently great, it would seem, to require protection measures, making the route that traverses less recharge area the most prudent.

In terms of water quantity, DEIS 3.4.3.1 cites a March 9, 2004 letter from the LDNR, Office of Conservation (OC) stating that no alternative route under consideration should have negative effects on the recharge of the Sparta. Alternative 4, if it facilitates a recharge lake, would benefit the aquifer by increasing its water supply. DEIS 3.4.3.1 states "Protection of the Sparta Aquifer recharge area was studied by...LDNR Office of Conservation... All of Claiborne Parish, nearly half of Webster parish, and other regions...were proposed as Critical Groundwater Areas..." DEIS clarified that OC issued a Draft Order (now final, CGWA-1-05) identifying critical ground water areas, none of which are within the I-69 SIU 14 corridor. The 'critical area' designation is the result of years of thought that is ongoing at state, regional, and parish levels, so qualifications are in order when using the term. The important point is that groundwater is limited and, from the standpoint of aquifer water supply, the preferable I-69 route is that which induces or facilitates development that contains withdrawal and/or enhances recharge, i.e. 'North Hills Lakes Project.'

3. Economic Development

DEIS Chapter 3 contains many references to Alternative 5 and its options as having "the greatest potential for induced land development." (The North Hills Lakes Project is referred to as a potential 'facilitated' development.) Is there much evidence for this often repeated statement?

DEIS, especially 3.3.4, describes Haynesville, Cotton Valley, and Homer as declining communities dependent upon a fading oil and gas industry, but it only describes Haynesville and Cotton Valley as needing new forms of industry that could benefit from I-69.

DEIS Summary S-5 states, "this new corridor in proximity to I-20 will make the entire region more attractive for transportation related businesses (e.g., trucking firms), and manufacturing businesses. Residential development will also likely be stimulated." Then, "The North Hills Lakes Project is currently unfunded and has no eminent schedule. However, should this project be implemented, substantial increases in residential development, supporting services, and infrastructure will be developed – all of which will have corresponding effects to wetlands, land use, water quality and other issues." Have the other developments no important considerations?

DEIS contains misinformation about the "North Hills Lakes Project," which it states is "the only regional land development project being seriously considered," and incorrectly refers to "injection wells," which has pejorative connotations to poorly informed readers.

Dr. James Robert Michael's "Water Resources and Scenic Attractions in North Louisiana's Sparta Area," as the project endorsed for study by Claiborne and Webster Parishes' police juries, should be the source of information about the "North Hills Lakes Project." URS was provided this project description. DEIS 3.3.5.2 states, "These lakes are proposed to help recharge the Sparta Aquifer through injection wells." Dr. Michael's proposal does not call for injection wells. Recharge lakes enhance recharge by retaining water over the recharge area that would otherwise run off and by the increased hydrostatic pressure inherent to a recharge lake. Injection wells -- advantages, disadvantages, costs of water quality protections -- are part of any consideration of approaches to a stressed aquifer, but they are not a part of the recharge lakes proposal.

In places, DEIS dismisses the 'North Hills Lakes Project' as without funding (e.g. DEIS Summary S-5: "The North Hills Lakes Project is currently unfunded and has no eminent schedule"), giving more weight to projected 'induced development.' But elements of the 'North Hills Lakes Project' are evident (2005 Lincoln and Jackson reservoirs legislation, a proposal by a mayor of a Bienville town for a lake in the Mt. Driskill area, and Claiborne-Webster lake considerations to which Alternative 4 could be helpful).

The ideal I-69 "Straight Route" would facilitate planned regional development that encompasses all these projects that are currently under study or development. Planned development consolidates resources, provides for more effective advertisement, and facilitates protection and development of the region's attractions. A retirement industry is the focus of most successful rural development in the United States today. Louisiana, alone among Southern states, is losing retirees. A strategic route for the 'North Hills Lakes Project' should be taken seriously.

4. Natural Resources Protection

In other places, DEIS gives almost exclusive weight to the North Hills Lakes Project as projected development [Example, Natural Resources Technical Memorandum (NRTM) 4.4: 'reasonably foreseeable future projects (e.g., North Hills Lakes Project)'], and this influences arguable rankings of alternative I-69 routes, with Alternative 4 and options least favored (NRTM 5.2).

I hope the NRTM is reconsidered. NRTM 4.4 states 'timber harvesting...will continue to comprise the major perturbation to uplands' and 4.5, '(f)rom a purely ecological perspective, no action would result in fewer adverse effects.' This implies that natural resources are benefitted by a tolerated status quo and discouragement of change. DEIS 4.4 then states that the North Hills Lakes Project "would have sweeping ecological changes."

The opposite assumption may be more germane to the protection of natural resources in rural areas, that is: 'the status quo is not acceptable and change is desired.' That, in fact, is the purpose of the 'North Hills Lakes Project' -- to increase ground water supply, one of the region's most precious natural resources, and to introduce regional planned development that places a premium on natural resources protection to improve the region's attraction as a retirement destination. To the author's knowledge, no other human development project in the North Hills region has conservation of natural resources at its heart. *Inaction in rural areas leads to continuing-degradation of natural resources.* The urban-based URS staff may understandably be

concerned about overly aggressive and irresponsible urban growth. The issues are different for rural development.

Furthermore, a third and active oil field in the recharge area along Alternative 5 must be as important a consideration for natural resource protection as a lake development that might be facilitated by Alternative 4. Development and operation of all forms of economic activity should be consistent with protection of natural resources.

Finally, I would appreciate a credible comparison of the more severe adverse effects of Alternative 4 in terms of streams and wetlands (DEIS team's assessment) relative to the more severe adverse effects of Alternative 5 for the Dorcheat as a scenic and recreational river (Scenic Rivers Coordinator's assessment).

Like most people who choose a rural home, I am seeking the I-69 route that is friendliest to the environment and its enjoyment. The evidence that I have sifted through favors Alternative 4 and its options.

5. The Neglected 'Straight Route' Alternative (along US 79/LA9)

DEIS 2.3.5 justifies rejecting the route most favorable to development of north Louisiana's rural renewal zone, an alignment along US 79/LA9 ('North Hills Lakes Project's' "Straight Route"): "...The corridor selection evaluation completed in fall 2003, concluded that an alignment along US 79 / LA 9 is not desirable because this area is already well served by US 79 / LA 9 and because a good portion of the alignment is paralleled by I-20 already....Therefore, existing facility improvements are not discussed as an alternative for full consideration in this EIS."

The first DEIS justification for rejecting the "Straight Route" is that the area is already "well served" by roads. But DEIS 2.1 predicts that by 2030 the roads to which DEIS 2.3.5 refers will be congested - LA 9 "between Minden and Homer" (is this an error?) reaching an LOS "D" and US 79 between Homer and Haynesville an LOS "E," whereas the currently planned widened 371 will be an LOS "A." In other words, Alternative 5 would relieve less congestion overall than the "Straight Route" or any route that serves more of Claiborne Parish.

The second DEIS justification for rejecting the "Straight Route" is that the route largely parallels I-20. To the extent that this is true, it seems an obvious advantage in terms of 1) reducing highway construction costs and 2) eliminating a separate Dorcheat crossing with the attendant adverse effects in terms of scenic views, recreational benefits, and wetlands/streams considerations. Any disadvantage, from the standpoint of this justification, would be less strategic intersections in terms of the project goal, economic development. But compared to Alternatives 4, and more so to Alternative 5, the "Straight Route" has more strategic intersections for the regional development project that DEIS (p.3-77) states is the only one in existence at this time, and the "Straight Route" is clearly more central to the Rural Renewal Zone.

CLAIBORNE PARISH WATERSHED DISTRICT
MEETING HELD MAY 9, 2005
RESOLUTION

Comment 4676
Attachment
7c

Re: the proposed Interstate I69 SIU routes -- Alternative 4 with Option 2&3 compared with Alternative 5 and its options in terms of the best alternative for the region.

RESOLUTION in support of proposed Interstate I69 SIU 14 Alternative 4 with Options 2& 3.

WHEREAS, the I-69 study team once selected a route referred to then as 1d, which is approximately the route now referred to as Alternative 5; and
WHEREAS, the I-69 study team has now, in response to public comments, reopened consideration of an alternative route, referred to as Alternative 4; and
WHEREAS, Alternative 4, is closest of the two routes to route 2b that the Claiborne Parish Watershed District endorsed at its August 27, 2003 meeting in preference to route 1d; and
WHEREAS, Alternative 4 best represents the preferred selection of alternatives presented to the public in June 2004; and
WHEREAS, Alternative 4 provides the closest proximity to the proposed North Hills Lakes Project, a regional endeavor to provide Sparta Aquifer recharge as well as tourism and economic development; and
WHEREAS, Alternative 4 and its options traverses less combined acreage of Sparta aquifer recharge and Chico terrace area than Alternative 5 and its options; and
WHEREAS, Alternative 4 minimizes adverse effects to the recreational and scenic use of Bayou Dorcheat [By adversely impacting the recreational and natural scenic qualities of the one public navigable waterway in Webster Parish, Alternative 5 detracts from the region's reputation as a 'Sportsman's Paradise' and therefore from the region's economic and quality of life potential]; and
WHEREAS, the more central location of Alternative 4 appears to better equalize the land dedication required by the project among the stakeholders of Claiborne and Webster Parishes and Columbia and Union Counties; and
WHEREAS, it also lies within a more central portion of the Rural Renewal Zone, providing an enticement for future economic development in this economically depressed region [We note that all of Claiborne Parish lies within the portion of Louisiana's Rural Renewal area that is within the study corridor. Alternative 5 would bypass most of Claiborne Parish.]; and
WHEREAS, Option 2 provides an alternate crossing of Comie Bayou in Arkansas along an existing pipeline right of way, suggested by the US Fish and Wildlife Service for consideration; and
WHEREAS, Option 3 minimizes adverse relocation and noise effects to residential areas in Claiborne and Webster Parishes particularly in the area along LA 3008 that otherwise would be affected by Alternatives 4 and 4.2; and
WHEREAS, we understand that environmental effects of both sets of alternatives are similar, other than the effects to Bayou Dorcheat, that projected costs of the project are similar, and that all possible alternatives meet the purpose and need for the project; and
WHEREAS, we note that Alternative 4 results in fewer grade separations and fewer cross road terminations than Alternative 5; and
WHEREAS, we further point out that the combined crossing of Bayou Dorcheat with pipeline and railroad crossings is at an already disturbed, un-navigable site;
NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the board of commissioners of the Claiborne Parish Watershed District hereby endorses the Proposed Interstate I69 SIU 14 Alternative 4 with Options 2&3.

Phillip Fincher
Chic Hines
Roger Pemberton
Norman Wilson
Alice Stewart

The signatures are those of all commissioners present at the May 9 meeting: Phillip Fincher, Chic Hines, Roger Pemberton, N. Maurice Wilson, and Alice Stewart. The resolution was adopted by unanimous vote of these commissioners.

Alice Stewart
Alice Stewart, Commission Chairman