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Threadfin shad, killed as a result of a late October cold front, wash back and forth near the public boat launch on False River in November.

False River set for drawdown, dredging

Effort to restore oxbow lake's health

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Still struggling to restore the health of ailing False River, the Pointe Coupee Parish Police Jury is about to draw down the water level of the oxbow lake for the third time for more dredging.

The parish will draw down the water level of the lake, a popular recreational waterway, starting Tuesday. The water level will be lowered by 5½ feet for the next four months.

State Rep. Major Thibaut, D-New Roads, said the state will install several more weirs along one of the two major tributaries that flow into the lake. It also will begin another large-scale dredging project on the north end of False River to remove decades of sediment buildup that has mostly contributed to the lake's decline, he said.

"We're trying to attack this thing from all ends," Thibaut said.

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Thibaut sits on the False River Watershed Council and pushed in the state Legislature to secure the more than \$4 million in state funds that have been used to improve the lake's water quality.

False River, once a premier spot for trophy bass fishing, has been in decline for several decades because of heavy silt buildup at the bottom of the lake that impeded vegetation growth and curtailed fish-spawning habitats.

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has given the parish the OK to lower False River's normal pooling stage, which is about

16 feet, twice since restoration efforts ramped up in 2012.

The drawdowns help sunlight reach the lake's bottom which, in turn, helps dissolve the heavy buildup of sediment beneath the water.

The drawdowns have sparked controversy. With the first one, property owners along the lakeshore complained that reducing the lake's water level caused structural damage to their bulkheads. Last year, it was criticized for causing a massive fish kill.

Nevertheless, state environmental experts have said the past two drawdowns have vastly improved the lake's water quality. They say it has helped with aquatic vegetation growth and with the solidifying parts of the lakebed, mak-

ing it easier for game fish to lay eggs and replenish their populations.

As a result of those improvements, the Police Jury has agreed to repeat several more drawdowns in 2020, 2023 and 2026.

Thibaut said state officials in the coming weeks will start installing weirs and making design modifications along one of the two canals that flow into the oxbow lake. Similar work to limit sediments draining into False River was completed recently along the other canal that flows into the lake, he said.

"These weirs will act like silt traps and slow down the water flow so you don't have that much erosion and sediment traveling into the lake," Thibaut said.

He noted about 30,000 acres of land drains into the two canals that flow into the lake.

Also in the fall, the parish will begin dredging the north end of the lake to speed up the restoration process.

A similar process was done on the south end, with engineers using the sediment removed from the lake's bottom to build a 16.5-acre containment dike island.

Thibaut said they won't build an island on the north end. Engineers are now trying to figure out where they'll dump the dredged material so they can get started on the project.

"We're trying to find an adjacent piece of property to pump the silt to," he said.

Follow Terry Jones on Twitter, @tjonesreporter.