The Atchafalaya Water Heritage Trail is a self-guided driving trail that explores the 14-parish Atchafalaya National Heritage Area, guiding visitors to more than 50 sites to illustrate how water has become the distinguishing influence on life here. Through the ages it has created ever-changing geography, shaped local culture, contributed to visuals and dramatic events, and endured a long history of human manipulation. Today a vast network of bayous, rivers, backwater lakes, marshes and the Atchafalaya Basin—America’s largest river swamp—set the stage for complex water control technology necessary for survival. This story is one of man and nature in an often foreboding but always majestic environment centered on a river we call the Atchafalaya.

Use this brochure, along with our website, to explore this driving trail. Many of the sites listed also serve as starting points to enjoy a wide range of outdoor activities, including paddling, birding and hiking.

Atchafalaya.org

**UPPER ATCHAFALAYA**

**LAND AT POWERFUL RIVERS**

The rivers that shaped this area began interacting thousands of years ago, creating intricate landscapes representative of a dynamic environment. During the last 300 years, the impact of settlement and development along waterways from here to the Gulf prompted construction of engineering marvels. These structures help minimize the risk that seasonal flooding will change the Mississippi River’s course to that of the Atchafalaya River. For sites in this area, see map Region A on reverse side.

**BETWEEN TWO RIVERS**

**TERRACES ON THE MISSISSIPPI**

This area is made up of features of Pleistocene terraces—the eroded remnants of ice age floodplains—and the modern Mississippi River valley. From prehistory to modern times, major settlements developed on the river’s high, natural, west bank levees and the even higher terraces on the east bank. The Mississippi is a major economic force here. The region depends greatly on water control structures further north to preserve the current course of the river’s massive flow. For sites in this area, see map Region B on reverse side.

**COASTAL ZONE**

**GROWTH TO THE GULF**

Wetland habitat loss occurs at high rates in this region’s coastal swamps and marshlands due to processes such as erosion, lack of sedimentation and subsidence. Development has also greatly affected the wetlands here, calling for a delicate (but difficult) balance between protecting populations and affected the wetlands here, calling for a delicate (but difficult)

For sites in this area, see map Region D on reverse side.

**GET A CLOSE-UP VIEW**

Get a close-up view of the massive infrastructure built on its unending quest to reach the Gulf of Mexico. The community of Cocodrie, in the southern-