

Levee plan would help park, official says

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A state park official testified Wednesday that a valuable state park would be protected when the Corps of Engineers plugs a gap in a Mississippi River levee in the Bootheel.

Ken McCarty, chief natural resources manager for state parks, said the plan would effectively double the size of Big Oak Tree State Park and provide it with a connecting channel to the Mississippi River.

Big Oak Tree State Park contains the last remaining fragment of uncut bottomwood forest in Missouri.

McCarty said that under the plan, 1,100 acres of farmland west of the park would be reforested and a connecting waterway would be dug from the park to the river. But he said fish might not swim through the concrete culverts that would probably be part of the waterway.

McCarty's testimony came in the second day of hearings before a Clean Water Commission officer who is reviewing the state's issuance of the permit for the project. The corps wants to spend \$85 million to close a 1,500-foot gap in a Mississippi River levee near East Prairie, Mo.