February 21, 2020

Submit to: mvnenvironmental@usace.army.mil

RE: BIPARTISAN BUDGET ACT (BBA) CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS; WEST SHORE LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN (WSLP), COMITE RIVER DIVERSION, AND EAST BATON ROUGE (EBR) FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT, BBA CONSTRUCTION MITIGATION EA #576

Dear U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,

We represent over one-hundred coastal stakeholders and community leaders who understand the great need for urgent action and innovative approaches to restore our coastal wetlands and protect our communities. We strongly encourage the Army Corps to consider using the construction of the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project as mitigation for the loss of bottomland hardwood and swamp habitat that will occur through the construction of the West Shore Lake Pontchartrain levee (WSLP).

As you are likely aware, the River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp is a widely supported project that will provide sediment and fresh water to existing wetlands in East Maurepas swamp, benefitting over 45,000 acres of swamp that are currently in a state of rapid decline. The project will aid the prevention of further wetland loss and the conversion of swamps to marshes, as well as helping to offset future increases in salinity throughout the Western Pontchartrain Basin due to subsidence and sea level rise. The fine grain sediment may also help increase elevation to a point where there are periods without inundation so that seeds can germinate, perpetuating the forest into the future.

The River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project will be built directly adjacent to the United States Army Corps of Engineers’ West Shore Lake Pontchartrain levee project. Our reasoning for the Army Corps’ selection of this project as mitigation for the WSLP are as follows:

- We believe that the long-term ecosystem benefits of the River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project would more than provide mitigation for bottomland hardwood and swamp habitat that is lost through the construction of the West Shore Lake Pontchartrain project.
- There will be cost savings and efficiencies by doing the projects in tandem.
- The River Reintroduction project will help build land which will provide a critical line of defense against storm surge that will benefit the WSLP project. This protection will reduce long term maintenance costs for WSLP and help protect the levee system.
- Army Corps investment in the River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project will alleviate pressure on a shortage of mitigation credits from mitigation banks in the area.
- Army Corps investment in the restoration project will free up precious restoration dollars so that CPRA can move forward on other shovel-ready, critical restoration
projects across the coast instead of using their agency funding on the balance of funds needed to complete the swamp restoration project.

Additionally, the restoration project will work with other nearby diversions to protect many communities in the region, including Baton Rouge. These projects will help maintain the Manchac Landbridge, a narrow strip of land between Lakes Pontchartrain and Maurepas. This will prevent the two lakes from merging, a situation that would be devastating and could send storm surge to communities from the River Parishes into the Greater Baton Rouge area.

The WSLP project presents a common-sense opportunity to reap multiple benefits by linking the levee project to the adjacent swamp restoration project. Providing funds to help construct the restoration project as mitigation for the loss of adjacent wetlands due to levee construction is a sound investment in coastal restoration and community protection. Choosing to use the River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project as mitigation for WSLP is just the type of innovative solution we need to restore our coast and protect communities in the face of a dire land loss crisis.

Sincerely,

Adam Adkisson
Triton Boats
Adam Knapp
Baton Rouge Area Chamber
Alan Ranson
Strike King Lure Company
Albertine Kimble
Vanishing Paradise Sporting Council
Plaquemines Parish Landowner
Alex Posorske
Ride NOLA
Allen Hughes
Avery Outdoors
Branded Brands
Greenhead Gear
Angela Chalk
Healthy Community Services

Arthur Johnson
Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development
Barbara Johnson
The Great Delta Tours
Ben Johnson
New Orleans Chamber of Commerce
Bill Buckley
Bill Buckley Outdoor Photography
Blaine Jones
Cajun Catch Seafood
Blaine Salter
Salter’s Jiggin Poles
Brent Roy
Venice Charters Unlimited
Brian Chandler
Key Corner Sportsman’s Club
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Clay Conner
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Deacon Joey Clavijo
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RNT Calls

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Wes Higgins
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Plaquemines Parish Coastal Zone
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Cc:
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