

# RESTORE

## THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER DELTA



MississippiRiverDelta.org

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October 26, 2020

Mark Wingate  
Deputy District Engineer  
Department of the Army  
New Orleans District, Corps of Engineers  
Office of the Chief  
7400 Leake Avenue  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70118

*Re: Letter of Support for Bayou La Loutre Ridge Restoration, CWPPRA Phase II Funding*

Dear Mr. Wingate & CWPPRA Technical Committee,

Restore the Mississippi River Delta Campaign (MRD) is a coalition of the National Audubon Society, the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, Environmental Defense Fund, the National Wildlife Federation, and the Pontchartrain Conservancy, representing thousands of Louisiana members and supporters. We work together to advocate for science-based restoration efforts in coastal Louisiana. MRD is dedicated to large-scale, ecosystem restoration in the Mississippi River Delta. As organizations with long-standing interest in coastal projects, we are writing to show our strong support for the priority project Bayou La Loutre Ridge Restoration (PO-0178) to receive Phase II funding.

The Bayou La Loutre ridge is an important feature in this portion of southeastern Louisiana that historically controlled hydrology in large portions of the area, preventing salt water from penetrating into inland communities. The ridge was formed by a historic distributary of the Mississippi River and now runs through communities in lower St. Bernard Parish. Though largely subsided, the ridge's surface expression continues as narrow bands of dredged material marking an earlier attempt to reopen the bayou, which still forms a diminishing hydrological barrier. However, connectivity of the ridge was destroyed with the construction of the MRGO canal which resulted in substantial alteration of the hydrology and severe saltwater intrusion in the area. The MRGO rock dam, completed in 2009, was placed near the historic position of the ridge to help restore some of the historical hydrology. Although construction of the rock dam has been extremely valuable in restoring regional hydrology, erosion of the old bayou ridge continues, increasing connectivity to backwater areas that are now subject to further internal erosion. Restoration of the ridge is a critical component to restoring the natural hydrology of the area to reduce the speed of marsh erosion and salinity intrusion in wetland areas decimated by the construction of the MRGO that provide important storm protection buffers for inland communities of St. Bernard, Orleans, and Plaquemines Parishes.



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Forested ridges are critical landscape components that control hydrology, and also serve as important wildlife habitat. More than 95% of Louisiana's forested ridge habitat has been lost since European settlement, according to the LDWF, making ridge restoration an important priority for the state. In addition, the State Natural Heritage Program lists the Bayou La Loutre ridge as most critically imperiled. The outsized importance of the Bayou La Loutre ridge as a hydrological control feature and the vulnerability of ridge habitat for wildlife in this portion of the state calls for restoration prioritization. In addition, ridge restoration is a natural progression of the other restoration projects in the area such as the MRGO rock dam and Lake Borgne Marsh Creation Project (PO-180). The ridge restoration will work together with these regional projects and the Coastal Master Plan to help restore and protect critical coastal habitat and reinforce coastal storm protection features of southeast Louisiana. Given the importance of this ridge to the entire area, we strongly support the nomination of the Bayou La Loutre Ridge Restoration (PO-0178) to receive CWPPRA Phase II funding.

Sincerely,

Brian Moore  
Vice President, Gulf of Mexico Policy  
National Audubon Society

Kim Reyher,  
Executive Director  
Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana

Natalie Snider,  
Senior Director, Coastal Resilience  
Environmental Defense Fund

John Lopez, Ph.D.,  
Coast and Community Program Director  
Pontchartrain Conservancy

David Muth  
Director, Mississippi River Delta and Gulf Restoration  
National Wildlife Federation

Steve Cochran  
Campaign Director  
Restore the MRD

CC:

Darryl Clark, Senior Field Biologist, FWS  
Bren Haase, Deputy Chief – Studies & Environmental Branch, CPRA  
Patrick Williams, Fishery Biologist, NOAA



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Karen McCormick, Chief, EPA

Britt Paul, Assistant State Conservationist/Water Resources, NRCS

