We, the undersigned, are natural and physical scientists, engineers, and social scientists with decades of research and technical experience related to Louisiana's coast. Many of us have dedicated our careers to studying the socio-ecological system of the Mississippi River Delta. Our collective interdisciplinary work has informed the State's efforts on the Louisiana Coastal Master Plan, the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and other coastal restoration and protection efforts. We know all too well from our research and life experiences what is at stake for the ecosystems and people of coastal Louisiana.

There is an opportunity in Louisiana to invest in restoration to build a more climate resilient future for Louisiana's coast. Throughout the world, river deltas are under threat from rising sea levels, climate change, and other human impacts. With annual inputs of sediment and fresh water, river deltas can continue to provide valuable habitats and other benefits in the face of environmental changes. However, human activity has altered many deltas around the world and the Mississippi River Delta is no exception. Levees built along the river for flood control and navigation have severed much of the delta from the flow of sediment needed to sustain land in the face of rising sea level, changes resulting from the construction of canals, and a series of other direct and indirect impacts. The release of the DEIS for the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion project is a significant step forward in reintroducing flows of sediment back into the sediment-starved wetlands that are necessary for the Delta's future.

The idea of a river diversion at Myrtle Grove is not new. A diversion at this location was first explored more than 35 years ago in a 1984 feasibility study by the Army Corps of Engineers, but the concept for the project began to take firmer shape in 2001 under the Coastal Wetlands Protection and Restoration Act and in 2004 under Louisiana's Coastal Area Program. Since that time considerable research has been conducted to better understand how to maximize the land building and sustaining benefits of river diversions as well as the ecological consequences of increasing freshwater flows and sediment inputs to the basin. With the diversion there will be changes in the basin –changes in water levels, sediment accumulation, and the distribution of salinity and some species of fish and wildlife. Efforts to mitigate for these changes should be as transparent and inclusive as possible. But without the diversion major changes are also expected to occur and the ecosystem will continue to degrade with continued sea level rise and wetland loss.

The Mississippi River Delta is one of the most-studied deltas in the world, and the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion has been developed using the best available science and modeling, and reasonable assumptions about future conditions. However, once the diversion is built and being operated, the actual conditions will determine how complex interactions between physical, ecological and social aspects of the system play out. We must continue to invest in monitoring and research to measure the project's success and better understand the changing environment, the diversion impacts to people, and to inform the robust adaptive management program that will inform decisions related to project operations. In addition, we believe that an independent and multidisciplinary science and technical advisory group - including physical scientists, ecologists, sociologists and other experts - should be established and engaged frequently to advise operation managers.

The future of Louisiana's deltaic wetlands depends on wise investment in restoration projects that provide long-term benefits to our coast. The Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion will help address the injuries to wetland habitat associated with the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill and is an important step towards a more climate-resilient future for Louisiana.

Signed,

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