

RESTORE

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER DELTA



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April 11, 2021

Senator Bob Hensgens, Chairman
Senate Natural Resources Committee
Box 94183
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70802

Care of Tyler McCloud, Senior Staff Attorney

Comments on the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion Draft Environmental Impact Statement Hearing

Dear Chairman Hensgens and Members,

Restore the Mississippi River Delta Campaign (MRD) is a coalition comprised of the National Audubon Society, the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, Environmental Defense Fund, the National Wildlife Federation, and 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.

We would like to thank you for holding a public hearing on such an important project as the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion. More public awareness and constructive engagement with the review process can only result in better outcomes. In support of that process, we have attached a fact sheet developed by the Environmental Law Institute, an internationally recognized, non-partisan research and education center. This fact sheet provides a straightforward overview of the process, and we ask that it be included in the hearing record.

We would also like to communicate our support for the proposed project.



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As many of you know, the Barataria Basin has one of the highest rates of land loss in the world, losing nearly 300,000 acres of land since the 1930s. These losses have severely reduced our storm protection, our world-class hunting, commercial and recreational fishing, and the overall habitat. Simply put, these losses will continue, if we don't take serious action now. The Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion is the game-changing coastal restoration project that uses the power of the river to build and maintain land. The project will build and maintain thousands of acres of vital wetlands to protect people from flooding from more intense hurricanes and sea level rise. Without action, our communities will see ever-increasing vulnerability to floods, continued loss of wetlands, and a collapse of key fisheries. As FEMA reports, every \$1 invested in disaster mitigation saves \$6, and this project will provide disaster mitigation.

Sediment diversions have been studied for decades and have been a part of many plans for restoration of our coast. After all of those studies, the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion is now, finally, poised to move into construction. It will build more wetlands than any other individual restoration project in the world because that is the scale at which we must operate to be successful here. And it will work in concert with nearby marsh creation projects, extending the lifespan of the millions of dollars that have been invested in the Barataria Basin. As described in the Draft Environmental Impact Study, using *only* marsh creation through dredged material placement is not the best approach, due to the much higher cost and lack of necessary sediment over the long term. Marsh creation alone is also not sustainable, as projects must be constructed over and over again, and dredging costs are very high. But both approaches, working together, can make the difference we need. This is the kind of efficiency the Coastal Master Plan can provide as its implementation moves forward.

This project will also stimulate the economy over several years. The DEIS estimates that as a result of the project's \$1.4 billion dollar investment, regional businesses will see a nearly \$1.5 billion increase in sales, household earnings could rise by as much as \$648 million annually during the construction-- and the project will support approximately 12,400 additional jobs. And although the DEIS does predict declines to certain commercial fisheries including brown shrimp and oysters, other commercial fisheries including blue crab, white shrimp, and recreational fish species like red drum and largemouth bass will see increases with the diversion in place. Most importantly, the state, through stewardship and mitigation measures described in the DEIS and accompanying restoration plan, is committed to responding to changes in the fisheries, and has outlined specific and substantial targeted support to help manage needed transitions to a more stable, sustainable environment in the basin.

This project is the only sustainable, cost-efficient way to build this much land.



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We very much appreciate your attention to this important matter and we remain available to answer any questions you might have on this critical project.

Sincerely,

Brian Moore
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