


RESTORE

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER DELTA



MississippiRiverDelta.org

 /MississippiRiverDelta



@RestoreDelta

September 20, 2021

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair, House Committee on Appropriations
H-307 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member, House Committee on
Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Vice Chairman, Senate Committee on
Appropriations
S-146A, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro, Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Granger and Vice Chairman Shelby:

Our organizations are part of the Restore the Mississippi River Delta (MRD), a coalition composed of the National Audubon Society, the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, Environmental Defense Fund, the National Wildlife Federation, and the Pontchartrain Conservancy, representing millions of members and supporters. The MRD is dedicated to restoring and conserving the ecosystem in the Mississippi River Delta.

On behalf of the MRD and our millions of collective members, we urge you to advance a disaster supplemental spending bill that addresses the significant impacts Louisiana has seen as a result of Hurricane Ida in 2021 and hurricanes Laura, Delta and Zeta in 2020. These historic storms caused widespread damage to the people and the ecosystems of Louisiana, including massive power outages, flooding, and loss of life. We also urge you to ensure that federal investments in disaster recovery increase community resilience by promoting nature-based solutions and other proven approaches to reduce future risks through restored wetlands, watersheds and ecosystems.

Investing in these natural infrastructure projects is one of the most cost-effective ways to build resilience to future flooding risks that continue to mount in the face of climate change, while also delivering other important environmental, economic, and recreational benefits to residents. Coastal restoration provides essential barriers for communities against wind and flooding, even as it protects vital habitats for birds and other wildlife, improves air and water quality, fosters local economies, and enhances recreational opportunities for all Americans.

Congress has the opportunity to produce cascading benefits by directing disaster supplemental resources to Louisiana's land loss crisis and restoring the coast. Those focused resources will create local jobs, protect vital economic infrastructure, and enhance the resiliency of coastal communities. They will also yield results for the national economy as Louisiana's diverse sectors, such as shipping, fisheries, energy, coastal restoration, and tourism, are interwoven into the health of the U.S. economy.

To that end, Congressional investment in long-term ecosystem resiliency must be guided by the projects and programs outlined in Louisiana's Coastal Master Plan (CMP), a comprehensive program for long-term and



sustainable ecosystem restoration and storm risk reduction. Specifically, as Congress considers a disaster supplemental funding package, we encourage you to fund the following priority programs and important nature-based projects in order to reduce pressing community risks while also restoring important ecosystems:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) – Ecosystem Restoration, Louisiana Coastal Area Program: The Corps of Engineers developed a comprehensive approach for coastal restoration in the Louisiana Coastal Area (LCA) program, much of which has been incorporated into the CMP. The LCA program, however, has yet to receive funding for its most critical projects, even as extreme weather events pose repeated threats to project areas. These projects seek to restore natural areas and processes to deliver both storm risk reduction and environmental benefits. Had they been implemented in a timely manner, some of the most devastating and costly impacts to Louisiana coastal communities might have been prevented or ameliorated.

Among the LCA projects that would be particularly effective for communities hardest hit by these storms are:

- the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Ecosystem Restoration project, which could reduce surge reaching vulnerable communities in the Pontchartrain basin, including the hard-hit areas of St Charles and St John parishes;
- the project to convey or increase Atchafalaya River water through the Gulf Intracoastal waterway to the marshes or Terrebonne Parish, which were massively affected by Hurricane Ida and serve as critical buffers for Terrebonne communities and for levee protection south of Houma, Louisiana; and
- the Terrebonne Basin Barrier Shoreline Restoration project, which also provides direct benefit to Terrebonne Parish communities as a critical element of Louisiana’s “Multiple Lines of Defense” strategy for this area.

In addition to these and other LCA projects, we urge funding for the ecosystem restoration components of the Southwest Coastal Louisiana Project to benefit communities devastated by hurricanes Laura and Delta in 2020.

Coastal Wetland Planning, Protection and Restoration Act Task Force (CWPPRA)—CWPPRA agencies -- including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service -- have a backlog of shovel-ready restoration projects in areas affected by these storms. Advancing funding for these projects would aid significantly in disaster recovery.

RISEE Act-- Increase revenue for coastal restoration and protection in Louisiana (and other coastal states) by passing the RISEE Act. Critically, this bipartisan legislation includes provisions for amending the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act of 2006 (Pub. Law 109-432) that will increase revenue shared with vulnerable Gulf coast states, including Louisiana, for coastal restoration and protection efforts. These dollars should be put to use to protect communities and to increase the resilience of the ecosystem over the long-term.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)—Increase the resilience of coastal communities located within the federally declared disaster areas impacted by Hurricane Ida through funding for the Emergency Coastal Resilience Fund (ECRF), also known as Title IX Fund grants as authorized under section 906(c) of division O of Public Law 114-113. Following hurricanes Florence and Michael, funds were allocated to the ECRF



RESTORE

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER DELTA



MississippiRiverDelta.org

 /MississippiRiverDelta



@RestoreDelta

for joint administration by NOAA and The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). Repeating this model would support shovel-ready projects to help disaster damaged communities recover in a way that will reduce future disaster impacts like storm surge, sea-level rise, debris flow, and stormwater runoff—while also improving the ecological function of coastal ecosystems to enhance fish and wildlife habitat.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)-- Louisiana will be entitled to significant funding from FEMA through Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) under the Stafford Act. Adequate DRF funding under the Public Assistance (PA) program will be essential to address damage from these storms to existing CMP projects.

Department of Interior—National Park and National Wildlife Refuge units suffered significant damage to both ecosystems and facilities. These include but are not limited to Sabine, Cameron Prairie, Lacassine, Breton, Bayou Sauvage, and Mandalay National Wildlife Refuges, and units of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, including the Barataria Preserve. Congress should prioritize ecosystem restoration funding for these important public parks and refuges.

We ask for your consideration of these investments as you work to fund important efforts to help communities recover from recent disaster events and build their resilience to a changing climate. Nature-based solutions provide an important opportunity to not only protect communities from the impacts of climate change, but also to repair habitats, ecosystems, and critical natural infrastructure. We appreciate your attention to this request, and look forward to providing any additional information and perspective regarding the overlapping needs of healthy communities, economies, and natural resources.

Sincerely,

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

Natalie Snider,
Senior Director, Coastal Resilience
Environmental Defense Fund

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

Kim Reyher,
Executive Director
Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana

Kristi Trail
Executive Director
Pontchartrain Conservancy

Steve Cochran
Campaign Director
Restore MRD



RESTORE

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER DELTA



MississippiRiverDelta.org

[/MississippiRiverDelta](https://www.facebook.com/MississippiRiverDelta)



[@RestoreDelta](https://www.instagram.com/RestoreDelta)

cc:

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House

The Honorable Chuck Schumer, Senate Majority Leader

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, House Minority Leader

The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Senate Minority Leader

