



November 22, 2021

**Re:** Proposed Second Amendment to the State's RESTORE Act State Expenditure Plan

Dear Chairman Kline,

The Restore the Mississippi River Delta Campaign (MRD) is a coalition of National Audubon Society, the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, Environmental Defense Fund, National Wildlife Federation, and Pontchartrain Conservancy, representing thousands of Louisiana members and supporters. We work in partnership to advance an equitable, safer, and flourishing coast for Louisiana's communities, ecosystem, and economy.

As we learned at the October Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) meeting, CPRA is proposing to seek authority from the Restore Council to reallocate \$60 million of the Spill Impact Allocation, or what is commonly termed "Bucket 3," from the Parish Matching Program to the River Reintroduction to Maurepas Swamp project (project number PO-0029 in the state's 2017 Coastal Master Plan).

MRD has evaluated the proposal at length and offer our support for this reallocation.

MRD has long been a strong proponent of the Mississippi River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project. Among the suite of projects proposed in the 2017 Coastal Master plan, we have identified it as a priority project<sup>1</sup> for coastal Louisiana. Reintroduction would restore the flow of freshwater, nutrients, and suspended sediment to the Maurepas swamp, mimicking a small natural distributary. It would improve hydrology by increasing flow-through and decreasing salinities; improve resiliency and long-term sustainability against relative sea level rise by increasing growth rates and soil accumulation; and it would increase primary productivity and ecosystem function and wildlife populations of swamp dependent species, while maintaining biodiversity in one of the nation's largest swamps.

As such, we believe the request to reprogram RESTORE Act funding to the Maurepas Swamp project is the right use of the funds at this time.

Additionally, MRD is encouraged by the continued willingness of the state and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to collaborate on integrating the West Shore Lake Pontchartrain and the Maurepas Swamp projects. If successful, the cooperation exemplified would be a model for others and demonstrate that combining risk reduction and restoration in complementary ways can achieve important results for vulnerable communities and their surrounding ecosystems. We look forward to being able to continue to support your efforts in advancing this critical project for the Pontchartrain region, as well as




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encourage the continued progress in achieving mutually beneficial goals with balanced integration of restoration and protection.

Finally, to address the Parish Matching program, given that the RESTORE Act and dedicated, recurring restoration funding generally is finite, we strongly encourage the Governor and the Louisiana Legislature to examine the possibility of finding alternative funds from identified state surplus, federal infrastructure, or future Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA) funds to augment parish investments into restoration uses as outlined in their own RESTORE allocations or within the upcoming 2023 Master Plan. Parishes which invest in projects using their allocation of RESTORE dollars or what are included within the Coastal Master Plan provide a pipeline of valuable “next generation” projects ushered through design and engineering. Additionally, parishes can also source local expertise to help craft beneficial projects specific for their region.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on both this project and the process. We look forward to continuing to work with you for a just, climate resilient coast where people and nature thrive.

Sincerely,

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