



February 27, 2023

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
500 Poydras Street, Suite 1117
New Orleans, LA 70130
Via Email: restorecouncil@restorethegulf.gov

RE: Maurepas and Bahia Grande FPL Amendment Comments

Restore the Mississippi River Delta (MRD) is a coalition of national and regional nonprofit organizations working to ensure an equitable, safer and flourishing coast for Louisiana's communities, ecosystem and economy. We are represented by conservation, policy, science and outreach experts from Environmental Defense Fund, National Audubon Society, the National Wildlife Federation, Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana and Pontchartrain Conservancy, and we represent thousands of Louisiana members and supporters. As a coalition with long-standing interest in coastal Louisiana, we appreciate this opportunity to provide comments on whether the RESTORE Council should amend its 2015 Initial Funded Priorities List (Initial FPL) and Funded Priorities List 3a (FPL 3a) to allow for funding for the River Reintroduction to Maurepas Swamp Project.

MRD is dedicated to large-scale ecosystem restoration in the Mississippi River Delta. The implementation and construction of the River Reintroduction to Maurepas Swamp (Maurepas Diversion) project remains consistent, to the maximum extent practicable, with Louisiana's Coastal Resources Program. With this in mind, we urge the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council to approve amending the Funded Priorities List 3a (FPL 3a) to include \$130,000,000 in implementation funding for the River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project in Louisiana.

The Maurepas Swamp is one of the largest forested wetlands along the Gulf Coast, encompassing approximately 141,000 acres of bald cypress and tupelo swamp. Since the 19th century, human action (the construction of levees, canal spoil banks and abandoned railroad embankments) has cut off the swamp's natural connection to the Mississippi River. Without that connection, the Maurepas Swamp has rapidly degraded over the last several decades.

We wholeheartedly supported the USACE's decision to use the Maurepas Diversion as the preferred mitigation alternative for the West Shore Lake Pontchartrain hurricane risk reduction levee project (WSLP). This decision followed a thorough Environmental Assessment study, Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement process, robust community and stakeholder input and an impressive collaborative effort between USACE and CPRA to discuss, plan and model the projects in concert with one another. The Maurepas Diversion and the WSLP together can collectively provide greater storm surge benefits than if they were built separately, provide cost savings and ultimately accomplish better results for the Maurepas ecosystem and its surrounding communities.




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Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on amendments to the Funded Priorities List 3a (FPL 3a). We encourage the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council to approve implementation funding for the River Reintroduction to Maurepas Swamp project. To combat the impacts of coastal land loss in Louisiana, we must build projects like diversions now so that they can start building habitat and maintaining land for future generations. We look forward to continuing to work together for a just, climate resilient coast where people and nature thrive.

Sincerely,

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