

February 21, 2020

Submit to: [mvnenvironmental@usace.army.mil](mailto:mvnenvironmental@usace.army.mil)

***RE: BIPARTISAN BUDGET ACT (BBA) CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS; WEST SHORE LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN (WSLP), COMITE RIVER DIVERSION, AND EAST BATON ROUGE (EBR) FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT, BBA CONSTRUCTION MITIGATION EA #576***

Dear U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,

We represent over one-hundred coastal stakeholders and community leaders who understand the great need for urgent action and innovative approaches to restore our coastal wetlands and protect our communities. We strongly encourage the Army Corps to consider using the construction of the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project as mitigation for the loss of bottomland hardwood and swamp habitat that will occur through the construction of the West Shore Lake Pontchartrain levee (WSLP).

As you are likely aware, the River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp is a widely supported project that will provide sediment and fresh water to existing wetlands in East Maurepas swamp, benefitting over 45,000 acres of swamp that are currently in a state of rapid decline. The project will aid the prevention of further wetland loss and the conversion of swamps to marshes, as well as helping to offset future increases in salinity throughout the western Pontchartrain Basin due to subsidence and sea level rise. The fine grain sediment may also help increase elevation to a point where there are periods without inundation so that seeds can germinate, perpetuating the forest into the future.

The River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project will be built directly adjacent to the United States Army Corps of Engineers' West Shore Lake Pontchartrain levee project. Our reasoning for the Army Corps' selection of this project as mitigation for the WSLP are as follows:

- We believe that the long-term ecosystem benefits of the River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project would more than provide mitigation for bottomland hardwood and swamp habitat that is lost through the construction of the West Shore Lake Pontchartrain project.
- There will be cost savings and efficiencies by doing the projects in tandem.
- The River Reintroduction project will help build land which will provide a critical line of defense against storm surge that will benefit the WSLP project. This protection will reduce long term maintenance costs for WSLP and help protect the levee system.
- Army Corps investment in the River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project will alleviate pressure on a shortage of mitigation credits from mitigation banks in the area.
- Army Corps investment in the restoration project will free up precious restoration dollars so that CPRA can move forward on other shovel-ready, critical restoration

projects across the coast instead of using their agency funding on the balance of funds needed to complete the swamp restoration project.

Additionally, the restoration project will work with other nearby diversions to protect many communities in the region, including Baton Rouge. These projects will help maintain the Manchac Landbridge, a narrow strip of land between Lakes Pontchartrain and Maurepas. This will prevent the two lakes from merging, a situation that would be devastating and could send storm surge to communities from the River Parishes into the Greater Baton Rouge area.

**The WSLP project presents a common-sense opportunity to reap multiple benefits by linking the levee project to the adjacent swamp restoration project. Providing funds to help construct the restoration project as mitigation for the loss of adjacent wetlands due to levee construction is a sound investment in coastal restoration and community protection. Choosing to use the River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project as mitigation for WSLP is just the type of innovative solution we need to restore our coast and protect communities in the face of a dire land loss crisis.**

Sincerely,

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*Brian Chandler  
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*Butch Davis  
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*Captain Anthony Buquoi  
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*Captain Chad Biliot  
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*Chris Brown  
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