

RESTORE

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER DELTA



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June 24, 2019

Vickie Amedee, Coastal Resources Scientist - Permits
Office of Coastal Management, Department of Natural Resources
617 3rd St, Baton Rouge, LA 70802

Re: Coastal Use Permit 20130675

Dear Ms. Amedee,

Thank you for the opportunity to express our support for the review and approval of the coastal use permit for the *River Reintroduction into the Maurepas Swamp (PO-29)* project.

The Restore the Mississippi River Delta Campaign (MRD) is a coalition of Audubon Louisiana, the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, Environmental Defense Fund, National Wildlife Federation, and Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, representing thousands of Louisiana members and supporters. We work together to advocate for science-based restoration efforts in coastal Louisiana.

We have designated the River Reintroduction into the Maurepas Swamp as a priority project for coastal Louisiana as this diversion would restore the flow of freshwater, nutrients and suspended sediment to the Maurepas swamp, mimicking natural spring overflow. 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 while maintaining healthy populations and biodiversity in one of the nation's largest swamps.

The Maurepas Swamp, southwest of Lake Maurepas, is one of the largest forested wetlands along the Gulf Coast. Historically, the swamp received sediment from the Mississippi River, which helped to keep the elevation in pace with subsidence, erosion, and sea level rise. The swamp was cut off from the natural connection with the Mississippi River at Bayou Manchac in 1814, and this closure was made permanent in 1826 by the State of Louisiana (Krauss, et al., 2017). Swamp logging began in Louisiana as early as the 1700's, but it was at its highest at the turn of the 20th century due to mechanization and access to rail lines and steamboats.

Located near Garyville, Louisiana, the Mississippi River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project is being designed to deliver a maximum flow 2,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) directly from the river through channelized flow and surface water to affect approximately 45,000 acres of surrounding wetland habitat. The project will facilitate fresh water flow between the Mississippi River and the entire project area.

Currently this project is in the engineering and design phase and has received \$14.2 million funding from the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (RESTORE) to complete design and get the project "shovel ready." The project, in total, is expected to cost around \$186.9 million as a part of the State of Louisiana's Coastal Master Plan



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of 2017. When constructed, it will provide much needed support for the Maurepas Landbridge, which is a critical line of defense for East Baton Rouge as well as communities around Lake Maurepas. To accommodate changing goals and restoration needs for the region, we recommend that the diversion structure, as well as the outfall management system, be designed to incorporate operational flexibility to address changing environmental conditions through an adaptive management program.

We hope these comments underscore the urgency of project implementation through timely completion of the permitting process and ensuing construction as we work together towards a sustainable coast.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Duet
Deputy Director,
Audubon Louisiana

Kim Reyher,
Executive Director
Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana

Natalie Snider,
Senior Director, Coastal Resilience
Environmental Defense Fund

John Lopez, Ph.D.,
Director, Coastal Sustainability Program
Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation

David Muth
Director, Mississippi River Delta Restoration Program
National Wildlife Federation

References:

Krauss, K.W., Shaffer, G.P., Keim, R.F., Chambers, J.L., Wood, W.B., and Hartley, S.B., 2017, Performance measures for a Mississippi River reintroduction into the forested wetlands of Maurepas Swamp: U.S. Geological Survey Scientific Investigations Report 2017-5036, 56 p., <https://doi.org/10.3133/sir20175036>.

