

**COASTAL PROTECTION AND RESTORATION RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR GOVERNOR-ELECT JINDAL'S COASTAL AND HURRICANE PROTECTION
ADVISORY COUNCIL HEARING**

December 3, 2007

Submitted by:

**Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana
Gulf Restoration Network
Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation
Louisiana Environmental Action Network
National Wildlife Federation
National Audubon Society
Sierra Club**

We are pleased that the governor-elect recognizes that the future of our state depends on our ability to reverse the threat of a collapsing coast, ensure the safety of our vulnerable coastal communities and reverse the pessimism of a skeptical nation. The signatories to this document represent the interests of Louisiana citizens and stakeholders united in the effort to protect and restore our coastal landscape. True to the spirit of cooperation that will be necessary to accomplish the daunting tasks ahead, we offer the following guiding principles and recommendations to assist in this challenging but critical endeavor.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF PROTECTION AND RESTORATION EFFORTS:

We urge the adoption of and adherence to these general principles for protection and restoration efforts.

Safe Communities and a Sustainable Coast

The ultimate goal of protection and restoration efforts must be to ensure the safety of our coastal communities and create a sustainable coastal Louisiana. A sustainable coastal Louisiana refers to a state of the wetlands, waters and barrier shorelines of coastal Louisiana that achieves and maintains a dynamic and productive synergy of ecologic, economic and social capacities that are resilient, adaptive and transformable to meet the needs of future generations with a minimal reliance on human intervention.

To this end, protection and restoration efforts should strive to mimic the historic natural land-building processes and utilize natural landscape features to enhance the structural stability of protection measures and the natural wetland hydrology. Restoration projects should maximize storm protection opportunities while concurrently improving and expanding habitat and the natural functions of the ecosystem. The state and U.S. Army Corps of Engineer's (USACE) planning efforts have endorsed these principles through adoption of the multiple lines of defense strategy and we urge the continued refinement of protection and restoration efforts to incorporate these recommendations:

Recommendations of the Multiple Lines of Defense Strategy:

- Maximize the coastal buffers outside of levees and floodgates to attenuate storm surge and promote a healthy estuary.
- Strategically position coastal restoration projects where they have an added benefit for storm surge attenuation and/or protection of the levee system.
- Evaluation of all projects based on the full integration of how restoration supports flood protection and vice versa.
- Immediately implement non-structural measures to sustain and protect coastal communities while additional lines of defense are developed and implemented.

- Utilize natural ridges and back levees as hurricane protection alignments to facilitate compatibility between development corridors and estuarine basins, allowing estuaries on the flood side to attenuate storm surge while remaining open to marine influence and elevated water levels from river diversions.
- Identify the lines of defense and habitat goals on a common map, allowing hydrologists, levee district managers, emergency personnel, natural resource managers, user groups, etc. to share a unified vision of a healthy, storm-buffering coast that will support Louisiana's economy and culture.

Complete Integration of Protection and Restoration

Protection and restoration projects must be fully integrated. Protection and restoration must be planned, designed, constructed, operated and maintained as complimentary components of a systematic approach to achieving a sustainable coast. All existing and future public works projects including navigation, transportation, flood protection and water control features must be integrated into the planning, implementation and monitoring process.

Full Utilization of Legal and Regulatory Authorities

Along with protection and restoration projects, efforts to restore a sustainable coastal Louisiana must utilize legal and regulatory authorities to ensure that development, permitting, zoning and building codes are an integral part of a systematic approach to coastal sustainability.

Application of Science and Engineering

Protection and restoration projects must incorporate the best available science and engineering. Hydrologic and ecologic models must be developed and refined for our entire coast to inform the planning, design and implementation of coastal projects. State and federal efforts must incorporate new scientific data gathered during project monitoring into future projects and planning. Incorporating the best science and engineering not only applies to the physical sciences, but must extend to the social and cultural sciences that evaluate the complex social interactions between the people of south Louisiana and the landscape where they live.

Consolidated Program Management Structure

There must be a coordinated management structure for overseeing all state and federal protection and restoration efforts to ensure the most efficient implementation and management of projects.

Increased and Continuous Stakeholder Engagement

The governor's announcement that his administration will initially focus on an ethics agenda for state government reflects a laudable and shared desire to infuse Louisiana state government with transparency, trust and accountability. This effort should extend equally to efforts to protect and restore coastal Louisiana. The efficient implementation of projects hinges on an active and real stakeholder process that values transparency, trust and accountability. We recommend that protection and restoration efforts incorporate an ongoing and meaningful public engagement program that facilitates and integrates diverse input from coastal constituents.

While the guiding principles stated previously should guide the comprehensive protection and restoration efforts over an extended period of time, the governor-elect set forth several specific and critical priorities for his new administration. We largely agree with the policies laid out in the governor-elect's coastal platform (*stated in italics below*) and provide the following recommendations to assist in the execution of the governor-elect's stated goals.

Implement near-term and long-term projects simultaneously:

For too long our coastal restoration program has focused primarily on small-scale near-term projects that are considered to be a band-aid approach to a massive crisis. We must implement near-term and long-term projects simultaneously to ensure our survival now and for future generations. In the near-term, projects such as barrier island restoration, marsh creation through dedicated dredging, pipeline sediment slurry projects and closing the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) are critical. However, we must also begin addressing long-term river diversion projects that will require separate federal feasibility studies.

Recommendations: Shift agency focus from planning to implementation.

- The Department of Natural Resources has focused largely on planning efforts for nearly two decades and must first transition to an implementation focused agency before simultaneously initiating the volume of projects pending engineering, design and construction.
- We strongly agree with the governor-elect's statement that closing the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) is a critical near term priority. Now that passage of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) has deauthorized the MRGO, we recommend that the governor move quickly with the assistance of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the USACE to clearly articulate goals and timelines and remove any obstacles delaying the restoration of 27,000 acres of wetlands and cypress forest damaged or lost in Orleans and St. Bernard Parishes by the opening and operation of the MRGO.
- Prioritization and coordination of projects is an absolute necessity to ensure that near-term and long-term projects that are implemented simultaneously are fully integrated. Additionally, all existing and future protection and restoration projects must be fully integrated across governments and agencies (parish, state and federal) to ensure that projects don't conflict and instead complement each other to produce maximum benefits. (e.g., adopting the state master plan as the blueprint for CWPPRA)
- The Department of Natural Resources must address staff limitations, commit significant resources and funds to the most critical areas, identify and eliminate bottlenecks, move away from the traditional, sequential model of implementation and develop parallel paths for project implementation.
- Planning must continue to move forward but should not interrupt implementation. Act 8 places responsibility for the direction and development of the state's comprehensive master coastal protection plan with the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority within the office of the governor. As envisioned, coastal planning for protection and restoration can and should be more efficiently directed by the Governor's Office of Coastal Activities.

Expedite projects:

Coastal restoration projects that are considered to be near-term projects are taking far too long to get off the ground. While projects are continuously delayed, the communities of South Louisiana continue to suffer with the consequences of coastal land loss. We must target any user conflicts, cut through the bureaucratic red tape, or address any internal government regulatory or bureaucracy issues that are slowing down the construction of these projects. We must set firm timelines for input by all parties so that all concerns can be addressed without needless delays. We should prioritize projects that have been identified as critical to our near-term survival and that can be placed on a fast track through design, engineering and construction.

Recommendation: Engaged, authoritative and accountable leadership.

- It has been nearly 6 months since the legislature approved the state master plan and yet many key contracts for beginning critical work remain mired in bureaucracy and stalled by inaction. The governor must investigate roadblocks and impediments and remove them immediately and formulate a process to reduce the time it takes to complete the state contracting process for protection and restoration projects.
- With the passage of the WRDA, the state must maximize federal dollars and personnel to expedite construction of those projects specifically authorized as part of the LCA Near-Term Plan.
- The inability to execute state and federal cost share agreements has indefinitely delayed critical restoration projects. Central to the expedition of projects is a framework for resolving state and USACE conflicts over cost-share agreements.
- The governor must be engaged, authoritative and conclusive in resolving conflicts, but should also develop a forward looking process to identify emerging conflicts among agencies and user groups. Projects will not move forward without clear priorities, strong leadership and clear directives from the governor.
- Environmental compliance uncertainties have plagued the USACE process and delayed critical projects. We recommend that the governor seek involvement from CEQ to ensure that environmental compliance standards are met and maintained with the greatest expedition and resolution of obstacles to critical projects.
- We urge the governor to fully utilize existing state authorities and agencies to expedite projects without creating new bureaucracies. Additionally, we recommend that the governor evaluate the ability to implement projects through the USACE and other federal programs.

Bond out revenues from the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS):

This legislation, signed into law last year, opens 8.3 million acres in the Gulf of Mexico and shares 37.5 percent of the new revenues, dedicated to coastal protection, with Gulf Coast states. Louisiana is projected to receive billions over the next 30 years that will infuse much needed financial resources into the effort to restore our coast. We should bond out these OCS revenues to help immediately commence this monumental task as soon as possible before more of our land, resources, and heritage simply erode away. There's no time to delay. By bonding out this money, we can immediately earn an estimated \$5 billion for our coastal restoration efforts, allowing us to begin work on major projects.

Recommendation: Prioritize projects with bond funding

- At this time we cannot offer our support or opposition to the bonding of projected OCS revenues, but the consideration of such a critical issue must include a decision making process that is transparent, open and accountable.
- The state is not currently prepared to begin implementing projects should a decision be made to immediately bond projected OCS revenues. A shift toward an implementation posture of the Department of Natural Resources will greatly increase the ability to begin project engineering, design and construction if or when bond monies become available. The prioritization of projects will help determine the best use of future funds.
- Irrespective of a decision on bonding future revenues, the governor must ensure that protection and restoration projects receive balanced funding.

Develop a new approach to levee building:

For years, Louisiana has relied on legacy design for levees, which has changed little over the past few centuries. This design has starved our coast and marsh from the resources they need to survive. Modern flood protection systems rely on innovative technologies that sometimes bear little resemblance to the traditional earthen levee embankments that have historically dominated our flood protection plans. Levees must be built with innovative designs, since we now recognize the importance of tidal exchange and natural hydrology.

Recommendation: Maximize natural protection features and regulatory programs.

- While a new approach to levee building should certainly be a priority, we must recognize that levees are a last line of defense for our communities. Many other opportunities exist to enhance the integrity, reliability and stability of levees by integrating the protection afforded by healthy marsh buffers, protective swamps and restored barrier islands. New approaches to levee building should maximize the advantages of natural protection features by working with the landscape and not against it.
- Land use planning must accompany new approaches to levee building. Land use planning, regulated at the parish level, has traditionally been detached and unrelated to coastal protection and restoration planning. The governor must work with local authorities to ensure that land use policies, including building codes and zoning regulations, are consistent with protection and restoration objectives and work to enhance the protection of communities both within and outside levee systems.

Use funds wisely:

Currently, too much money is wasted on administration costs. In order to expedite projects and demonstrate our efficient use of federal dollars, we must ensure that at least 75 percent of the project's funds are allocated to contractors for construction. Now that Louisiana will receive a greater share of OCS revenues and has the potential for funding of many other authorized projects, we must demonstrate to the country that we are capable of spending the funds wisely in order to implement an effective coastal restoration program. Doing such requires our state government to deviate from the status quo. The state must limit dollars spent on administrative costs and pursue bonds to expedite projects.

Recommendation: Achieving results with fiscal accountability.

- We strongly support shifting spending priorities to emphasize engineering, design and construction of protection and restoration projects and ensuring a standard for fiscal accountability.
- We support utilizing contractors to expedite project implementation while also limiting the size of government, minimizing the burden on agency resources and promoting job growth and opportunity. Additionally, we recommend creating incentives for completing engineering, design and construction phases ahead of schedule and for developing creative solutions to technical questions.

Use and pursue the best science possible without slowing down projects:

The coastal land loss problem facing our state is highly complex, as are the proposed strategies to address it. We cannot tell the communities in danger to wait for years as the search for a perfect science and design solution takes place. We simply do not have that luxury. We must act immediately using the best science available at the time, make adjustments to our approaches as we learn more, and build upon the science and technology already developed. Our efforts to restore our coast have the potential to be the world's most educational classroom and laboratory, allowing researchers around the world to come to Louisiana to contribute their expertise and learn from our experiences. Working with our universities to establish centers of excellence in these fields critical to coastal restoration will encourage economic development, the development of new technologies, and improved construction practices.

Recommendation: Linking Applied Science and Project Specific Science.

- The storms generated a wealth of new information about how our coast functions under the most severe circumstances and we are still struggling to apply that information to the engineering and design phases of project development. It is essential that we develop a real and coordinated framework to integrate science into the project development process. We certainly understand and support the sense of urgency that must accompany future protection and restoration activities and recommend that project development continue to move at the fastest pace possible while utilizing an adaptive

management process to assure that projects continue to be modified over their lifetime by consistently integrating newly acquired information.

- Coastal restoration and protection efforts must proceed despite immense uncertainties about future conditions, restoration and protection synergies, public acceptance, management objectives, and the allocation of existing natural resources. It is imperative that the state immediately develop and implement the adaptive management strategy proposed in the state master plan.
- All too often, applied science at the research level and project specific science at the project design level are disconnected endeavors that fail to build upon their respective achievements. We must implement a specific framework that creates and encourages an integrated and bilateral relationship between project specific science in the field and applied science in our universities.
- Working with our universities to establish centers of excellence should begin by investing in our higher education system to train and equip professionals that are well prepared to contribute solutions. The state should also develop and invest heavily in a plan to stimulate a coastal restoration industry capable of attracting global interest and investment. Linking our research efforts to this specialized industry will serve the added bonus of attracting professionals and experts to a new and emerging industry, but will also provide our best and brightest with opportunities to stay in Louisiana.

Continue to sell the issue and our success stories:

While most Louisianians have heard the alarming data many times, we must aggressively promote the severity of the problem to the rest of the nation. Our state loses approximately 25-30 square miles of coastland every year, an amount equivalent to nearly two football fields worth of land every hour. We have lost nearly 2,100 square miles of our coast over the last 70 years, of which 217 square miles were lost due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. We will lose another 1,000 square miles in the next 50 years if we do not take aggressive action now. Louisiana will need the support of the federal government, numerous industries, and academia, among others, to restore our coast and develop comprehensive hurricane protection. This support will have to be sustained over many years. Louisiana makes significant contributions to the nation's energy needs and supplies fresh seafood to the country and world. The entire nation benefits from the Louisiana coastline and has a vested interest in ensuring its survival. Efforts such as the America's Wetland Campaign are a good start, but we need to make even more efforts to convince Washington and the rest of the country that saving our coast is worthy of their support. Undertaking this effort in a transparent and responsible way will demonstrate to the country our successes in implementing projects and using any assistance given efficiently.

Recommendation: Demonstrate value and return on investment.

- Positive public opinion is a valuable asset and we should certainly continue to educate the nation about Louisiana's abundant natural resources and our contributions to the nation's energy needs and the national economy, but we must also find new ways to convey the value of coastal protection and restoration initiatives that demonstrate a tangible return on a national investment.
- In addition to the efforts suggested, we recommend promoting the carbon sequestration benefits of large scale restoration activities that demonstrate yet another national benefit and could provide yet another opportunity for financing restoration activities through the creation of a carbon credit program.
- Wastewater assimilation is another example that has the potential to simultaneously nourish damaged and dying wetlands and dispose of treated sewage effluent in a beneficial way. If done correctly with proper safe-guards, permit requirements, and scientific backing, these projects could demonstrate yet another versatile and practical function of wetlands to provide real benefit to appropriate communities and population centers.

Address stakeholder issues:

As we begin this massive process, we must proceed with great care in order to minimize any negative effects to various stakeholders. The impacts of projects on navigational interests, land rights, and fisheries must be addressed on the front end of project development to ensure consensus and the ultimate success of the program. We should also pursue liability protections that balance the rights of all parties, but allows these projects to go forward without fear of frivolous lawsuits. Reasonable and predictable limits on damages will ensure justice can be served without jeopardizing critical funding needed to complete coastal restoration projects.

Recommendation: Implement ongoing and permanent stakeholder engagement.

- Stakeholders must be part of the planning process from the very beginning. Maintaining ongoing and lasting opportunities for stakeholders to contribute to the planning process will help identify multiple use conflicts early in the planning phase, build trust and confidence in the planning process, and also reveal potential problems before they emerge as actionable delays to the implementation process.
- As noted, the state must pursue liability protections that balance the rights of all parties, but also allows projects to go forward without fear of frivolous lawsuits. To that end it is imperative that the governor implement policies to stop and prevent speculative leasing.
- Nearly 5 years ago the Department of Natural Resources coordinated preliminary planning efforts to create an ongoing and permanent stakeholder engagement program to address stakeholder issues related to coastal protection and restoration. Inexplicably, the planning effort waned for no discernable reason. We recommend that the program be revisited, planned, funded and fully implemented to address stakeholder issues on the front end of project development.

We look forward to working with the governor-elect and the transition team to offer our assistance and cooperation on these common goals. Time is critical to our success and we encourage the governor-elect to pursue these recommendations with diligence, urgency and accountability.