

**Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
Public Meeting for Draft Comprehensive Plan Update**

Morgan City, Louisiana – Sept. 22, 2016

Principals:

Justin Ehrenwerth (Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council), Homer Wilkes (USDA), Johnny Bradberry (LA), Chip Kline (LA), Gibb Owen (USACE), John Bowie (EPA), Jessica Kondel (DOC), John Tirpak (DOI)

Additional Support:

Chris Barnes, Morgan Crutcher, Jean Cowan, Ann Weaver, Jessica Henkel

The meeting started at 6:00 p.m. and lasted 41 minutes. There were 17 people in attendance, not including Council representatives, staff and support.

Introductory remarks:

Remarks were made by: Johnny Bradberry, Chair of Louisiana and Coastal Protection Authority.

Justin Ehrenwerth provided a PowerPoint overview of the draft Comprehensive Plan Update.

The public comment began at 6:25 p.m. and lasted 16 minutes.

Public comments (There were 5 speakers):

Simone Maloz, Restore or Retreat:

Thank you for the opportunity, thank you for coming to Morgan City. Restore or Retreat started 16 years ago with the mission to aggressively implement large-scale restoration. We support that aspect of the plan. Also, our organization was founded on the basis of going back to natural processes in our basin. We support going back to natural processes, and fully support the inclusion of the natural processes of sedimentation and freshwater diversions. We fully support the science-driven decision-making process as you go through the plan itself. We have seen in the past how these efforts support successful restoration. We will also probably submit written comments and work with other partner for comments on the Barataria-Terrebonne footprint of the basin.

Joni Tuck, Greater Lafourche Port Commission, responsible for Port Fourchon and South Lafourche Airport:

The Commission is responsible for service for over 90% of deepwater oil & gas operations in the Gulf of Mexico. We are going to submit comments later but appreciate everything the Council has done: The work, the plan, your commitment to coming out to Morgan City. We

are also happy to see a commitment to the large-scale ecosystem restoration projects. Especially collaboration with NFWF and NRDA and CPRA and all the other programmatic entities and authorities. Port Fourchon is a perfect example of how environmental restoration is economic restoration. The inherent benefit of landscape restoration is protecting economic infrastructure. We encourage the Council to select the next generation of projects based on most urgent ecosystem needs. The economy will benefit from that. But if economic impacts are imposed as a screening criteria on front end then that could divert funds to less resilient ecosystem projects. You can't have an economic project without a natural buffer in front of it.

Barney Callaghan, LA Wildlife Federation and National Wildlife Federation Through Partnerships:

First off, I commend the Council for your diligence, and for keeping this thing going. The first time I ever heard a presentation about coastal land loss was in the mid-90s and everyone was not convinced at that time that we had a problem. They estimated it would be 16 billion dollars to fix our coast. We all know that is a pipe dream now, and we have to stay the course to get this done. Even when those RESTORE dollars run out, I hope the council is still going to be active in the future. I cannot even comment on all the good that has been done with projects in our state. Recently I had the opportunity to visit the Elmer's Island project and it is beautiful and amazing. You really need to be commended for that. I'd also like to comment not just on the coast but some of the Pot 2 suggestions in the Maurepas Swamp area. The Maurepas Swamp is dying a long death, it really needs revitalization. I first heard about the Maurepas diversion in 1991. It was funded then for engineering and design. Again in 2007, and 2014-2016, I have emails about it, and we're so glad to see it is still alive. It is an important part of coastal restoration. It is a proactive approach. I commend y'all for that and for protecting that money. We all know how it has been attacked and we really have to be aggressive in keeping those dollars where they need to be kept. I'm from the Dularge/South Terrebonne area where there was a project a few years ago - Lake Mechant Landbridge. What we really need to look at is that we are shocking these ecosystems. They are degrading and switching from fresh to salt. But now the land bridges are turning the insides of project areas completely into fresh water. This year we are experiencing a bloom of invasive vegetation, of hyacinths. Before the year is over we are going to have canals that are normally open that will be closed and you may have parishes coming back to ask for long-term maintenance dollars. We need to discuss this. Timbalier Island is in dire need of maintenance. I don't know if that will come from RESTORE but it needs to be maintained in the long run.

Mac Wade, Port of Morgan City:

Welcome to Morgan City. Thank you for being here. I have all good news. Everyone gets up here and talks about problems. We've done everything you are talking about doing without a lot of assistance. We have the only two growing deltas in America. Wax Lake and Atchafalaya are growing without anyone doing anything. I'm here tonight to tell you if you

want to help grow stuff, build stuff, we have everything you need, we just need your assistance. I don't care what bucket it comes from, we just need your assistance. In last 20-30 years, we have created 1/3 of all beneficial use land in the entire state and it was done by accident. Not to restore barrier islands. It just happened because of the river. We are not leveed past Morgan City. Atchafalaya Wildlife Management Area is one of the largest in the state. Besides the thousands of acres we have created, it's a wildlife habitat. The wildlife is amazing. 40,000 acres surrounding the island is bird habitat. Migratory birds, wading birds, it's a perfect habitat. If you want to double that, expand that, please talk to us. The material is there and doesn't have to be moved long distances away. We have everything you need to grow the habitat and vegetation. Thank you very much for listening.

Karen Gautreaux, Nature Conservancy:

Appreciate the opportunity to comment. The Gulf of Mexico has been a long term priority for the Nature Conservancy, as has the Mississippi delta and coastal ecosystems. We're really excited about this plan. First, we want to thank the Council members and Council staff for the hard work and collaboration to get this revision done in this amount of time. Some particular things to highlight that we are supportive of in the Plan – First, the importance of cooperation and coordination among agencies and funding sources associated with Deepwater Horizon; Reaffirmation of the watershed approach; Commitment to large-scale projects, which are important everywhere, but especially important in Louisiana; Reliance on natural processes to support ecosystem integrity; Exploration of creative conservation funding; Commitment to public engagement and reliance on science-based decision making. We look forward to working with the Council and its members in the future to implement the plan. We, along with other NGO colleagues, will be submitting comments.