

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

**New Orleans, Louisiana – Sept. 19, 2016**

**Principals:**

Justin Ehrenwerth, Robert Bonnie, Johnny Bradberry, Chip Kline, Toby Baker, Ben Scaggs, Jessica Kondel, Greg Steyer, Marc Wyatt, Gib Owen

**Additional Support:**

Alyssa Dausman, Ann Weaver, Jessica Henkel, Kirsten Dorans, John Ettinger, Chris Barnes, Morgan Crutcher, Stephen Tatum, Homer Wilkes, Britt Paul, Nanciann Regalado, John Bowie, Chris Pease

*The meeting started at 6:00 p.m. and lasted approximately 60 minutes. There were approximately 60 people in attendance, not including Council representatives, staff and support.*

**Introductory remarks:**

Johnny Bradberry

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

*The public comment began at approximately 6:25 p.m. and lasted about 35 minutes.*

**Public comments (12 speakers):**

Tyler Ortego, Founder and President Ora Estuaries - works with oyster reefs to create living coastal infrastructure, I speak as a business owner and as someone who works on coastal restoration. I appreciate the commitments to large-scale restoration and the independent science panel. I also like coordination from different funding groups. For scale, there's different ways of scaling things. Bigger projects like diversions and marsh creation and shoreline protection, land acquisition, etc. Diversions don't scale. Marsh creation scales. For every unit you put in you get another unit of output. That's linear. I have a hypothesis that for oyster restoration you can do better than linear scale. How to tap into that? If you commit to being innovative and inclusive you will get everyone knocking on your door. How to separate wheat from chaff? Small magnitude RFPs (requests for proposals) for ecosystem metrics. Do large or small-scale metrics without adverse impacts, take those things that work and then scale them.

Steve Cochran, Director, Restore the Mississippi River Delta, First of all, a heartfelt thank you. Collectively, the Restore the Mississippi River Delta has been very involved to help direct the revenue from the civil and administrative penalties to do the work you are doing. At this stage, we are feeling about as good as we can feel about this work and the willingness to continue trying. Second, a couple of items that were part of the agenda, just

to emphasize the idea of large scale is essential for us here. The land we are on here is a gift of the River. Back to history, that is how it came to be in the first place. Large-scale is the only opportunity to do this at the scale that matters. Third, the coordination aspect of it. Because you have multiple platforms that coordination is essential and having stakeholders understand how that process works is essential. Finally, synergies. You have done a great job talking about synergies, especially financial synergies. Synergies are also ecological synergies. When you look at the numbers and the resources, please look at those synergies. I also want to focus on one project. The effort to look carefully at the operation of the lower River. Integration of restoration and navigation, the ability to look hard at that and really move forward on that is key. Make that happen as we move forward.

Robert Perez, Plaquemines Parish (public-private partnership)/Port Eads Fishing Refuge, We have shovel-ready the whole project for dredging of South Pass. Wildlife management area on the east side of South Pass is shovel-ready. Todd Baker with Wildlife and Fisheries has been giving updates to the Corps for several years. Our process is the development of Port Eads. We want to build marine wetlands for education for the Bird's Foot Delta, estuaries and ecosystem, for young people to come down to see and also learn about Deepwater Horizon. 40 miles from the spill at South Pass. One of my cohorts is here to discuss further, but please consider putting this at the top of your list.

David Muth, National Wildlife Federation, representing National Wildlife Federation's Gulf Restoration Program and Restore the Mississippi River Delta, Thank you. It is important to tackle this as a Gulf-wide problem that requires large-scale comprehensive solutions. Need to tackle the Mississippi River Delta, tackle problems of all the states such as in Texas, Mobile Bay, Mississippi Sound, Florida, etc. The key is to take a hard look at the resources that are available. We have a lot of money but it's not enough to do everything. We have to pick those projects that have Gulf-wide implications and Gulf-wide success. Our partners are preparing written comments. Challenge now on this great plan is to pull off the greatest ecosystem restoration efforts. Geographically nobody has ever tackled something so big as the Northern Gulf of Mexico. We hope very much that we can see success and in 15 years look back and be very proud of what we have accomplished. Thank you.

Jacque Kuchta, Port Eads Fishing Refuge Nonprofit from Plaquemines Parish, Designed to run Port Eads facility for benefit of Plaquemines Parish and the State. Comments are specific to the Mississippi River Delta focus area. Modified reconsideration for Oct 2014 submission for Pass a Loutre using dredge material from Pass a Loutre Mississippi River area. We believe this project meets all four priority criteria. Highlights are the wildlife management area is 40 miles from Mississippi Canyon block 252. Would create 648 acres of net new wetlands at a cheap and competitive price. It's sustainable. We have partners in Wildlife and Fisheries, Wildlife Management Areas, etc. and all have done a great job building wetlands and increased water flow would help. Navigation dredging has created thousands of acres including in the Bird's Foot Delta and without coastal restoration dollars. This would make South Pass safe. With the Eastern Gulf of Mexico opening up for

oil and gas, Southwest Pass could be opened up as a safety valve if a spill or accident takes place. The Lower Mississippi River port complex is the largest in the world and today our main tributary South Pass is not navigable. The area represents 80% of Plaquemines tourism. \$1.1B of economic impact annually goes to fishing in Cabo, \$600M to Costa Rica. South Plaquemines and Venice are the most fertile fishing grounds in the lower 48. Areas of Port Eads are not accessible. LUMCOM (Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium) etc. and LSU and LDWF (Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries) would put research vessels there and could make it an outpost for monitoring progress. It's permitted, shovel ready and we would appreciate the opportunity for you to take another hard look at it.

Coleman Ridley, Managing Director for Business Council of New Orleans and the River Region, Nonprofit public policy organization, We are dedicated to addressing quality of life issues in New Orleans such as coastal restoration. Business leaders understand that restoration is urgently needed to build businesses and raise families. This is central to economic survival. Proceeding expeditiously would help shipping, oil and gas and other business sectors including fishing and would also provide a tremendous economic boost to the region. I have seen significant job growth in the job sector for water management even before Deepwater Horizon. Water management is the biggest growing sector in the region. I appreciate the Council's recognition of large-scale projects like sediment diversions and hope the Council will fully consider synergies like how projects build off each other to get maximum benefits. Similar to the Louisiana Master Plan, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and we want to make sure federal and state agencies get it right. The Business Council of New Orleans and other business leaders are watching closely, because this is critical to the future success of our region.

Stacy Ortego, Outreach Coordinator, Louisiana Wildlife Federation, I commend the Council for refining the plan and for the selection of projects, especially inclusion of 10-year strategy and commitment to engaging the public and transparency and collaboration with other partners. I highlight that although the 2010 spill was devastating, this is a unique opportunity to maximize as much as possible for large-scale restoration. I am happy to see projects such as Maurepas Swamp, Biloxi Marsh to help restore areas damaged by MRGO (Mississippi River Gulf Outlet).

Kimberly M. Johnson, TruFund Financial Services Inc. (Fishermen and small businesses), I ask that the Council be careful to engage the public, transparency is key. Include local fishermen and small businesses so they can see that they are included.

Sean Turner, Vanishing Paradise (Outdoor Fishing Show), National Wildlife Federation, I have been coming to meetings since I was 9 years old. I am glad to see some things are getting done but so much left to do. Cat Island south of Leeville has disappeared in my lifetime. I have fished that since I was 6 or 7. And Pelican Island. It hurt a lot. I'm 13 and I can tell you where land has disappeared. On the Outdoor Fishing Show, every time we go by Dularge and everywhere, we pass by areas that have disappeared. And the gates that

people put up preventing local fishermen from getting into certain areas hurt everyone. Please don't spend public dollars on areas the public can't get to.

Danil Faust, I am just learning about all of this. I know that on pages 6-7 there is a process for submitting projects. Has there been any thought given to updating the electrical grid? Any thought given to updating the electrical grid for the locals? I will go ahead and look up more information about this.

J.D. "Zack" Lea - One of the things I'd like to urge you to do is to broaden the scope of your operating mentality, basic policies you use to decide on what do with money available. Consider how we might be able to have more impact with the same amount of money if we included more completely the private sector in the work that you do. To me, our entire effort here seems to be "restore". The idea that we have lost a lot and what we will do is to put it back where it used to be. That is like a relief project. We would get better impact on funding and have more public support if we consider this like a development project. We have tremendous resources in the coastal zone. Don't let it go back to nature. We should be developing that zone in a way that not only creates storm protection and surge protection as we know marsh can dampen waves. A levee obviously does a lot of good in protecting from strong storms. If one levee is good, why not two more? One thing I have come to understand is the Corps doesn't understand the benefit-cost ratio of any levee. What does it mean in terms of reduced insurance cost if we put up another levee just south of St. Bernard? Another aspect of this, what if we installed other types of levees or barriers? Close to land could be levees, further out could be bulkheads. The important part of getting private sector to work with these is these barriers would be the place of attachment for businesses. One example is vertical oyster reefs, which could quadruple production if we can work out how to arrange for vertical oyster reefs to produce barriers. One example of this is where they brought the stone in from out of state - only protects from wave action. There's other ways to do that like with a vertical oyster reef. I urge you to consider to broaden the base of what you do and bring in the private sector more.

John Koefler, Lower Ninth Ward, I have been following this process for quite some time. I am impressed to see that this is a science-based process. This is so important to us because everything you will deal with has state's agreements and laws. Science has to start regardless of that and not looking at all that. When a plan was done for a diversion in St. Bernard, it was started by saying we can't consider Pearl River water because there's an agreement about that or Lake Pontchartrain or Bonne Carre Spillway because we have an agreement. Well we need an open and transparent scientific process so we can figure out what agreements among states might need to be changed to accommodate the big picture.