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affiliated with
NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION

Res. No. 8C, 2010

SUBJECT: HOUMA NAVIGATION CANAL LOCK CONTROL STRUCTURE

WHEREAS, the Houma Navigation Canal (HNC) is a 36.6 mile navigation channel that begins at the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW) in Houma, La. and extends southward to the Gulf of Mexico that was constructed by Terrebonne Parish Government in 1962 to provide a direct route for commercial vessel traffic between the port of Houma and the nearby offshore oil and gas fields and fishing grounds, and

WHEREAS, the HNC channel was originally constructed to the dimensions of 15 feet deep by 150 feet wide, excavated thru rural lands, cypress swamps, fresh and brackish marshlands and eventually Terrebonne Bay on it's path to the to the Gulf of Mexico, and

WHEREAS, the excavation of the HNC has drastically changed the landscape of the surrounding communities and the environments it traverses, not only in physical appearance, but in altering the natural ebb and flow of tidal waters affecting tens of thousands of acres of fragile ecosystems in the heart of Terrebonne Parish, and

WHEREAS, the ill effects of tidal action and saltwater intrusion exacerbated by this open conduit thru the coastal wetlands were soon evident in severe bank erosion and the degradation of the freshwater environment, first on the southern most end of the channel, then working steadily northward with no control structures to dissipate flow velocities or hurricane storm surges, and

WHEREAS, numerous studies and environmental monitoring of the Lower Terrebonne Basin have concluded that since it's construction in 1962, the uncontrolled tidal flow and frequent storm surges funneled through the HNC have significantly accelerated the loss of coastal swamp and marshlands in conjunction with other environmental factors such as erosion, natural land subsidence, and sea level rise, leaving it's unmistakable "scar" across the terrain of southern Terrebonne Parish, growing with every passing year much like the damage caused by another well known, ill conceived project in St Bernard parish known as the "MRGO" (Mississippi River Gulf Outlet), and

WHEREAS, despite the imminent environmental and community flooding dangers posed by the HNC's waters, it still remains one of the area's most important economic necessities, transporting countless tons of petroleum industry supplies and support service personnel to Louisiana's expanding offshore oil and gas production infrastructure, and

WHEREAS, in 1974 a channel expansion project was completed to increase the channel dimensions to 18 feet deep by 300 feet wide, further escalating the deterioration of the landscape, adding to the complex problem of designing effective flood control measures, and opening the door to questions about the need for future expansion of the depth and width of the channel, and

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WHEREAS, in response to the worsening HNC conditions, in 1997 a Houma Navigation Canal Lock Study was conducted in response to Congressional direction provided in Section 425 of the Water Resources Development ACT (WRDA) and was immediately challenged as a constraint to future expansion of the depth/width of the channel and restriction of commercial development potential for the area; given this challenge and other unanswered questions, no further action was taken, and

WHEREAS, in 2002 the Corps of Engineers, (COE) Chief of Engineers' report recommended construction of a flood protection project known as the Morganza, Louisiana to the Gulf of Mexico Hurricane Protection Project (Morganza to the Gulf), which has drawn public criticism for it's proposed design route selection, and

WHEREAS, one key feature in this project was a multipurpose lock structure located in the HNC, south of the town of Dulac, La., at a strategic location, utilizing the natural terrain, stable banks and access roads for construction; this lock, if designed and operated correctly, would serve to control saltwater intrusion, and reduce bank erosion in the HNC caused by turbulent tidal flow, and

WHEREAS, a design and engineering study was authorized by the COE for a true operational lock structure on the HNC, but construction estimates were so high that the study was tabled as cost prohibitive for the foreseeable future prompting the search for alternative ideas to provide interim flood protection for local communities until such time that a permanent solution is authorized, and

WHEREAS, the Terrebonne Parish Levee District (TPLD) has moved forward to design and secure funding for an affordable "Swing Barge" submersible gate structure, in lieu of a fully operational lock, and is currently awaiting COE and other regulatory agency permits to begin construction; TPLD also continues to draw criticism for it's actions in response to public safety demands for an improvised approach to this problem but at this time, no other affordable options show promise to bring relief to this situation.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Louisiana Wildlife Federation (LWF) supports the construction of the proposed swing barge, floodwater control structure on the lower Houma Navigation Canal (HNC) near Dulac, La. and urges the US Corps of Engineers to expedite necessary permitting to begin construction immediately in the interest of protecting vulnerable wetlands, private property, and the citizens of Terrebonne Parish from hurricane storm surges.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the LWF urges Congress to authorize the further design, engineering, funding and construction of a permanent operational lock system on the HNC for the protection of the people and the communities of south Louisiana, and to aid in the preservation of coastal wetlands by controlling the intrusion of saltwater via the HNC.

Adopted by the Louisiana Wildlife Federation in convention assembled, February 28, 2010 at Cypress Bend Resort, Many, Louisiana.