



## LOUISIANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

*The voice of Louisiana's wildlife and natural resources since 1940.*

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June 2, 2021

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
New Orleans District  
Attn: CEMVN-ODR-E; MVN-2012-2806-EOO  
7400 Leake Avenue New Orleans, LA 70118

Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group (LaTIG) c/o of NOAA

Re: Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion (MBSD) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)

Mr. Laborde and Mr. Landry:

Louisiana's coast is critical to not only the people who live, work, and recreate here, but to the entire nation. World-class fishing attracts people from all over the world. Our ports are a major player in international trade. The nation's energy needs are largely supported by the oil and natural gas industry located along our coast.

Our coast is disappearing. It is vital that bold action is taken to help protect communities, businesses, and natural resources from the devastating effects of hurricanes, storm surge, and sea level rise. **The single biggest thing that can be done to help mitigate some of this loss – and address this crisis – is to allow the Mississippi River to do what it's done for thousands of years: build land with its sediment and nutrient-rich water.**

Levees constructed along the river with the goal of flood protection and promoting easier navigation have cut off the river's ability to sustain the delta, resulting in continued land loss — about 4800 square kilometers in less than 100 years, and almost a quarter of that was in Barataria Bay. Hurricane Katrina only compounded the problem. Additionally, in 2010, The *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill exacerbated our coastal crisis even further and severely impacted wildlife that depend on our estuaries. Approximately 95% of the marsh oiling along the Gulf occurred in Louisiana – the heaviest of that oiling was in the Barataria Basin. The basin was especially hard hit with land loss rates doubling or tripling after the oil spill. Since the 1930's, Barataria Basin has lost more than 276,000 acres of land; if nothing is done, that number will nearly double in just 50 years. **Without the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion (MBSD) project, this basin's estuary will collapse.**

A problem of this magnitude requires innovation. The MBSD project is one of the largest environmental infrastructure projects in U.S. history. Leveeing of the Mississippi River resulted in a saltier Barataria Basin, causing saltwater species to make a northward shift; without restoration, these changes will continue, resulting in a loss of species that rely on productive freshwater and intermediate wetland habitats. Reconnecting the river to the basin will maintain vital wetlands and restore the health and vitality of the entire ecosystem.

Using diversions as a method of coastal restoration has been studied for over 35 years; the results of these studies over the last few decades has made it clear that reconnecting the river to the delta is the most viable option to combat coastal land loss. We don't have decades more to waste.

LWF supports the preferred alternative as outlined in the draft Environmental Impact Statement for the MBSD as well as the draft Restoration Plan to use funds from the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill settlement to implement this project, which will help to restore the overall health of the ecosystem that was injured as a result of the oil spill.

The Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion is the cornerstone of Louisiana's Coastal Master Plan – which LWF has always supported – and will help support and enhance the lifespan of other coastal restoration and protection projects. Combined with other proposed restoration projects, the MBSD would build and preserve more than 17,000 acres of wetlands over the next 30 years to restore critical wetland habitat injured by the oil spill. It is exactly the scale needed to address the very serious challenges facing Louisiana's coast.

As the project advances, it is important that federal and state decision makers center community needs in planned mitigation and stewardship efforts. This project will have many positive, long-term benefits, including increased storm surge protection, job creation and regional economic impact during construction, and increased productivity of natural resources. There are also foreseeable adverse effects possible as the project restores natural balance in a declining ecosystem. The Trustees must work proactively and collaboratively with potentially impacted communities to develop and implement ideas and proposals for adaptation and mitigation, and be as detailed and transparent as possible throughout the process.

LWF encourages the development and implementation of a robust adaptive management program that incorporates knowledge gained from monitoring of the project over time and considers input from key stakeholders.

A future without the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion is a future we cannot afford, which is why LWF supports the preferred alternative outlined in the draft Environmental Impact Statement and the expenditure of Deepwater Horizon settlement dollars to pay for the project's construction and associated mitigation and stewardship activities.

The MBSD will be a game-changer for the long-term health of communities and wildlife habitat in the Mississippi River Delta, including places where alligators, crawfish, red drum and largemouth bass abound.

Our Sportsman's Paradise attracts people from all over the world with its fisheries, wildlife, and abundant natural resources. That paradise is in serious peril and needs large-scale restoration projects like the MBSD. This project is critical to turning the tide on the state's land loss crisis and protecting vulnerable communities from hurricanes and sea level rise, while also ensuring the long-term health of the ecosystem and wildlife in the face of a changing climate and coast. Simply put, the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion is our best hope for a sustainable future.

Louisiana Wildlife Federation is a statewide conservation organization representing more than 6,500 members and 19 affiliate organizations supported by hunters, anglers, hikers, paddlers, birders, campers and other outdoor enthusiasts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca Triche". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rebecca Triche  
Executive Director