



# LOUISIANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

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

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Re: EO JML 24-13 Phase 5 Report Final Draft

Louisiana Wildlife Federation (LWF) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the EO JML 24-13 Phase 5 Report Final Draft released Jan. 6, 2025.

LWF commends the immense work the Department of Energy and Natural Resources (DENR) has put into the recommendations of the draft report with a purpose of modernizing and streamlining natural resource management around the state.

While there are a number of clear recommendations included in the draft document, there remain a number of questions, concerns, and confusion around several elements.

### **Natural Resources Commission**

Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has a lofty goal to “guide strategic decision-making processes in natural resource governance by synthesizing insights from leadership, middle management, regulatory entities, and external stakeholders.”

However, as a commission of leadership from various agencies, it will take a staff to help provide that information for the commission's review. The three positions outlined in the draft won't be enough to handle the vast scope and quantity of information that will be needed.

As such, questions remain on what organizations or staff will be providing these synthesis documents and white papers for the commission's review and decision-making. In addition, under key priorities for the commission, it appears it will be mostly dedicated to communication with some work in “crafting adaptive governance models” which is unclear in meaning and intent. For a commission that is called “a cornerstone of the DRIVE Initiative,” there needs to be more clarity in roles and responsibilities included in the document so a reader outside of DENR can understand the practical application of the commission's role and which offices will be guided by the commission.

As to the commission membership, while we thank DENR for incorporating statewide flood control interests, choosing just one interest to serve defeats the purpose of having a diverse approach to the issue. The interests of Department of Transportation and Development, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, and Upland Restoration and Management Authority are

different, and each organization brings a different expertise, mission, and focus to the work of flood control management.

In order to have the best representation, LWF recommends that each of the three organizations be given a seat on the commission to truly provide for an integrated and collaborative approach to managing Louisiana's natural resources.

Thank you for clarifying that the commission will only replace other task forces and boards within DENR jurisdiction and doesn't apply to boards outside that authority such as CPRA board or the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Commission.

However, while consolidating boards can be an important feature of efficiency, LWF cautions consolidation to the point of generalization where important topics aren't given the attention they deserve. For example, further into the document, it is outlined that consolidation of boards like the Water Resources Commission and groundwater management entities be centralized under the Mineral and Energy Board. The need to manage and assess Louisiana ground and surface water resources is so essential, there is concern that this topic could be overshadowed by the Mineral and Energy Board's historic mission and not receive the attention it requires.

LWF applauds DENR's desire to address Louisiana's challenges on a regional basis in order to pool resources and expertise. Parish lines typically don't separate challenges faced by a region and by encouraging a regional, cross-parish approach, DENR is truly encouraging the prioritization of funding models and governance structures that incentivize long-term planning and efficiency over short-term fixes.

### **Rebranding**

The rebranding of DENR to the Department of Energy and Conservation (DEC) needs to have a definition of what "conservation" means to DENR. As outlined in the draft document, conservation appears to only involve "stages of natural resource projects, from permitting to decommissioning."

Instead, the current name seems to reflect DENR's mission for energy and natural resource management when it comes to oil, gas, and emerging energy fields such as wind and solar.

### **Developing a proactive approach with an innovative culture**

LWF applauds DENR for the work on reforming job descriptions as well as promoting the development of the next generation of DENR staff. Through this section, DENR outlines how "we've always done it this way" will be replaced with adaptive management and lessons learned from introspection in order to develop more efficient and responsive rules and policies.

### **Operational focus and departmental offices**

While we are glad to see the inclusion of organizational charts in this chapter, the first graphic doesn't include any description of what is being depicted and would be better if it was organized into a reporting structure like the next few graphics show.

LWF applauds the creation of the Office of Permitting and Compliance (OPC) in order to centralize permitting activities under DENR in hopes of making permitting more efficient and publicly transparent. The suggestion that OPC would be positioned to receive primacy for issuing Clean Water Act Section 404 permits has our attention and one that we look forward to reviewing once applied for in the future.

Under the Ecology Division description, there is some confusion in the language that needs clarifying since the structure will include: Coastal habitat restoration, wetland preservation and shoreline initiatives (currently CPRA) and has a focus on water resources, flood management, and watershed protection (currently Louisiana Watershed Initiative, DOTD, levee boards, and more). It would be good to outline how this office will work with other entities currently undertaking these activities and how this will create efficiency and not duplicate roles.

Under the Office of State Resources, LWF applauds the goal of establishing a statewide resource management framework for water resource regulation and strategic management. LWF encourages DENR to include in this office's mandate the formation of a statewide water budget that will allow for better management of surface and groundwater sources.

Under the Natural Resources Trust Authority, it is still unclear how, in practical terms, this authority will work, what funding will be administered by the authority, and what funding will be distributed by the authority.

Under the Office of Energy, LWF thanks DENR for the inclusion and increased details around utility-scale solar and wind under renewable energy deployment.

Under the strategic partnership division, LWF applauds DENR's push to leverage partnership with academic, industry, and other government agencies for the development of best practices.

### **Chapter 5 – Transforming the statewide approach**

It appears that the Red River Waterway Commission will be expanded to take on the responsibilities of URMA, but it is unclear if this organization will hold both names and responsibilities, or if URMA will subsume the commission.

While it will be of great benefit to have one agency who can be the point person for federal entities such as U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, there are many questions that remain on how this will be implemented. For example, questions remain on what staffing needs URMA will have that extend well beyond what Red River Waterways Commission currently offers, the potential for the Red River area to lose the benefit of an entity focused entirely on the region, and the difference in skill sets needed to effectively manage a regional waterways commission versus effectively managing a multi-regional area focused on flood control.

The draft report rightly points out that while CPRA provides a science-based five-year master plan, annual plans that strategically lay out priorities, and funding to achieve specific goals, the rest of the state does not have the same access to strategic planning. Giving URMA the role of developing these types of strategic plans will benefit the state but will require a dramatic increase in staffing.

However, when getting into specifics about how the organization of the flood protection effort will be organized, the graphic on page 68 is confusing because it appears to show that DOTD's public works will have oversight of URMA. While a DOTD relationship is the short-term plan, that is contrary to the long-term goal. The same graphic also appears to show CPRA as having control over the Sewage and Water Board, which hasn't been described in the written portion of the document. In all, the graphic needs to be clarified as to these relationships as well as the newly expanded role of the Chief Resilience Officer and Red River Waterway Commission.

### **Chapter 6 – Strategic Vision: Institute of Energy & Conservation**

Chapter 6 outlines a vision to create the Institute of Energy & Conservation which would foster interdisciplinary collaboration across academic, government, and private sectors.

While LWF applauds this interdisciplinary approach, there is some question from the description whether this would be an independent organization set up outside of DENR or if it would be organized and run through DENR. Since the institute would be modeled after the Bureau of Economic Geology based at The University of Texas, would there be a similar home at a Louisiana university?

In conclusion, LWF thanks DENR for being responsive to stakeholder comments and actively recruiting and responding to feedback during this process. This Phase 5 report represents an enormous amount of work, both internally and externally, and contains many needed changes and reorganizations to ensure efficient and mindful management of the state's natural resources.

Please reach out if we can provide any assistance.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Triche  
Executive Director