



October 31, 2023

The Honorable Michael Connor  
Assistant Secretary of the Army  
108 Army Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20310  
Sent via email: [michael.l.connor10.civ@army.mil](mailto:michael.l.connor10.civ@army.mil)

Cc: Chair Brenda Mallory, Council for Environmental Quality  
Director Shalanda Young, Office of Management and Budget

*RE: Prioritization of Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Ecosystem Restoration*

Dear Mr. Connor,

We are writing to ask for the prioritization and swift advancement of ecosystem restoration along the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) federal shipping channel. This long-overdue effort is critical for communities in and around New Orleans, and we ask for your help and attention in ensuring that restoration work moves forward with all possible speed and efficiency, to address the catastrophic damages from the MRGO. As part of this prioritization, we respectfully request funding for MRGO Ecosystem Restoration be included in the President's fiscal year 2025 budget. This restoration effort is key to supporting environmental and social justice after the devastating impacts of the shipping channel.

Mandated by Congress in 2007, restoration to address the impacts of the MRGO to the Greater New Orleans area has been planned, but to date, no funding has been allocated for implementation of the Army Corps' MRGO Ecosystem Restoration Plan. Without this restoration, the MRGO impacts continue to pose a significant risk. The Greater New Orleans area is facing intense pressure from climate change and the degraded ecosystem along the MRGO only exacerbates the risk.

Constructed in the 1950s, the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet federal shipping channel impacted over a million acres of coastal habitat and completely destroyed tens of thousands of acres of protective wetlands that historically buffered the Greater New Orleans area during storms. Despite being recognized as a "hurricane highway" and repeated pleas for closure, it took the deadly disaster incurred during Hurricane Katrina to finally take steps to close the channel to navigation. Initial steps were taken to close the MRGO channel in 2009, and the Army Corps

*The MRGO destroyed families in the Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans East, and Chalmette. It has to be closed. It is a moral imperative." – Pam Dashiell (1948-2009), community leader, 2006*

finalized a plan for restoration in 2012. However, due to a dispute over responsibility for funding, further action was halted.

Finally, the Water Resources Development Act of 2022 clarified that restoration is a fully Federal expense. We celebrated this long-awaited clarification, and now urge the Army Corps and Administration to prioritize and advance MRGO Ecosystem Restoration efforts with all possible speed and urgency. With over a decade of Army Corps inaction on restoring the MRGO Ecosystem, there should be no further delays. The Army Corps should immediately initiate work to restore the MRGO and the wetlands destroyed as a result of that channel. Any cost increases (or study update needs) resulting from the Army Corps' long-delayed action should not slow these efforts.

*"The swamp was my therapy. I watched it die. I wish I can see it start living again." – John Taylor (1946-2023), community elder and naturalist, 2013*

In carrying out this work, the Army Corps should engage impacted communities and other relevant stakeholders as an integral voice and partner in ensuring a more holistic recovery from damages. Community concerns, points of interest, and opportunities for the local workforce to be a part of the restoration economy in communities devastated by the shipping channel are an important part of the restoration and recovery. The damages to communities and the ecosystem from the MRGO federal shipping channel are so severe that the delays in restoring this ecosystem and aiding communities in their recovery are hard to comprehend. But those invested in building more resilient coastal ecosystems in Louisiana have not forgotten what is due.

Despite the urgent need to restore the MRGO ecosystem, we have seen little progress from the Army Corps on MRGO Ecosystem Restoration. Eighteen years after Hurricane Katrina, this restoration effort must move to a top priority. Impacted communities are also facing considerable environmental risks from another federal project intertwined with the MRGO, the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal lock expansion, which the Army Corps continues to prioritize despite decades of pushback and legal battles from the local community. Rather than continuation of lock replacement, efforts should concentrate on healing a very large area wounded by the MRGO.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter for the thousands of people impacted by the MRGO and over a million people who depend on restored and healthy wetlands in the impacted area.

Sincerely,

*MRGO Must Go Coalition*

American Rivers

Citizens Against Widening the Industrial Canal

Coalition for Coastal Resilience & Economy\*

Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana

Common Ground Relief\*

Crescent Soil & Water Conservation District\*  
Environmental Defense Fund  
Global Green  
Healthy Gulf  
Holy Cross Neighborhood Association  
Justice & Beyond\*  
Katrina National Memorial Foundation\*  
Levees.org  
Louisiana Environmental Action Network  
Louisiana Wildlife Federation  
Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper  
lowernine.org  
Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development  
National Audubon Society  
National Wildlife Federation  
Neighbors First for Bywater\*  
New Orleans 350\*  
Orleans Audubon Society\*  
Pontchartrain Conservancy  
Sierra Club – Delta Chapter  
Sông Community Development Corporation  
St. Bernard Wetlands Foundation\*  
The Arlene and Joseph Meraux Charitable Foundation\*  
The Lower 9 Community Wellness Consortium\*  
The Water Collaborative\*

*About MRGO Must Go:*

*The MRGO Must Go Coalition was founded in 2006 in response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The Coalition's mission is to ensure that the ecosystem impacted by the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet is restored. The MRGO Must Go Coalition includes 19 local and national environmental, social justice and community organizations. Visit [mrgomustgo.org](http://mrgomustgo.org) to learn more.*

*\*supporting organizations in addition to the MRGO Must Go Coalition*