



Congress Looks to Full Federal Funding for MRGO Ecosystem Restoration Plan

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(NEW ORLEANS – December 8, 2022) Congress released the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) 2022 language this week, including authorizing full federal funding for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) Ecosystem Restoration Plan. The plan, completed in 2012, is a comprehensive strategy to restore the vast estuarine habitat affected by the MRGO, a deep-draft navigation channel that contributed to numerous levee breaches and catastrophic flooding during Hurricane Katrina. As a result, hundreds of people in New Orleans East, the Lower Ninth Ward and St. Bernard Parish lost their lives.

"This WRDA marks a crucial milestone for addressing the disastrous legacy of the MRGO. More than 17 years after Hurricane Katrina, Congress has clarified its original intent – to fully and federally fund implementation of the MRGO Ecosystem Restoration Plan. With this clarification, we can build upon our past achievements in habitat restoration and continue forward on recovery that impacted communities so rightly deserve" said Amanda Moore, director of the National Wildlife Federation's Gulf Program and coordinator of the MRGO Must Go Coalition.

The 2009 closure of the MRGO benefited Louisiana's coastal ecosystems more than any other restoration project implemented since Hurricane Katrina. The entire Pontchartrain Basin experienced a restored and balanced hydrology, with salinity gradients closer to the historical conditions of the 1960s, pre-MRGO. As a result, the region will be able to support a wide array of species and habitats such as bald cypress swamp forests and oyster reefs, which also work effectively as lines of defense allowing work to be done to rebuild the vital storm surge buffer on which vulnerable communities rely.

Despite these advancements, progress on large-scale restoration had slowed down significantly, largely due to a lack of clarity on funding responsibility despite Congressional calls for action after Katrina.

"We consider MRGO ecosystem restoration to be a critical need for southeast Louisiana. The MRGO disrupted a delicate estuarine landscape, which as a result has significantly degraded. The landscape is valuable because it provides habitat to many species of wildlife, provides local communities with hunting and fishing grounds, and reduces storm surge in a vulnerable portion of southeast Louisiana's coast" said Michael Hopkins, Coastal Program Director at Pontchartrain Conservancy.

"The clarification of federal responsibility for implementing the MRGO Ecosystem Restoration Plan is a major step in the journey to bring some equitable justice to impacted communities – and it is long overdue. As restoration moves forward, we hope communities are directly engaged in the project processes and the restoration economy created by this effort" said Arthur Johnson, CEO of the Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development.

WRDA 2022 is included in the National Defense Authorization Act, which is expected to move to a final vote in the next few days.

About MRGO Must Go Coalition:

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 wetlands affected by the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) are carefully restored in a timely manner. The MRGO Must Go Coalition includes 19 local and national environmental, social justice and community organizations. Members include: American Rivers, Citizens Against Widening the Industrial Canal, Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, Deep South Center for Environmental Justice, Environmental Defense Fund, Global Green, Healthy Gulf, Holy Cross Neighborhood Association, Levees.org, Louisiana Environmental Action Network, Louisiana Wildlife Federation, lowernine.org, Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper, Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development, National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, Pontchartrain Conservancy, Sierra Club – Delta Chapter, Village De L'est.

For more information, visit mrgomustgo.org

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