

# MAUREPAS SWAMP PROJECT

## MITIGATION INFORMATIONAL GUIDE

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Mississippi Valley Division, New Orleans District (Corps) is evaluating mitigation measures to compensate for unavoidable wetland impacts resulting from construction of the West Shore Lake Pontchartrain (WSLP) project. The WSLP project will provide a 100-year hurricane risk reduction system for residents of St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, and St. James Parishes.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Corps must follow a prescribed evaluation process for the WSLP project. As part of this process, the Corps completed an Environmental Assessment (EA 576) that evaluated several alternatives to mitigate for environmental impacts. The tentatively-selected mitigation alternative that was proposed in EA 576 utilizes a multiple-projects approach that prioritizes options in the following order:

- 1) Utilization of mitigation banks within the Lake Pontchartrain Basin (LPB)
- 2) Construction of mitigation projects within the LPB
- 3) Utilization of mitigation banks and construction of mitigation projects outside of the LPB

## SO WHERE DOES MAUREPAS FIT INTO THIS?

The Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA)'s River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project (Maurepas project) was not evaluated as a mitigation alternative within EA 576.

However, in response to public comments received on the EA and at CPRA's request, the Corps is evaluating the Maurepas project in a separate NEPA document called a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS).



General layout of WSLP Project (green) in relation to the Maurepas project features which will be within the River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp footprint (red). The pink line indicated the shared features. The yellow line is the conveyance channel for Maurepas.

The Maurepas project is largely a preservation mitigation option that uses benefit areas within a larger CPRA restoration project to offset WSLP swamp impacts. The project is a maximum 2,000 cubic foot per second (cfs) freshwater river diversion with the intake located on the east bank of the Mississippi River in St. John the Baptist Parish, immediately west of Garyville, LA, at River Mile 144 above Head of Passes. It will reconnect the Mississippi River with the Maurepas Swamp, providing necessary freshwater, nutrients and sediments that are vital to restoring the degraded baldcypress-tupelo swamp.

## WHY IS MAUREPAS THE BEST OPTION FOR MITIGATION?

The Maurepas project is the optimal in-kind compensatory mitigation option to offset WSLP project construction impacts for the following reasons:

- By constructing the Maurepas and WSLP projects concurrently, CPRA and the Corps would attain cost savings and efficiencies. Cost sharing would free up restoration funds to allow CPRA and others to pursue other priority projects.
- Together, both projects will provide significant storm surge protection that is collectively greater.
- There currently are not enough swamp credits available in approved Lake Pontchartrain Basin mitigation banks to offset construction impacts of WSLP.
- Selection of the Maurepas project, rather than prioritizing mitigation bank credits, would forego the depletion of such credits within and outside of the basin that are needed for other projects that require mitigation.
- Since the projects are adjacent to each other, using the Maurepas project as mitigation ensures impacts are offset in the same watershed.
- The Maurepas project also offers an extensive benefit area that can satisfy all required mitigation credits, rather than having to piece together credits from mitigation banks and multiple smaller mitigation projects. Functions and services of swamp habitats would be replaced in-kind, providing direct ecological linkages within the same ecosystem.



## IMPORTANCE OF MAUREPAS SWAMP RESTORATION

Iconic as one of the largest remaining intact contiguous forested wetland complexes in the Lower Mississippi River Alluvial Valley and among the largest in the nation, the Maurepas Swamp is of critical ecological and socioeconomic importance. However, the Maurepas Swamp is imperiled by multiple stressors that are resulting in declining forest health and conversion to marsh habitat.

Benefits provided by the Maurepas Swamp:

- Improved water quality
- Reduced storm surge risk
- Increased coastal resilience against storms, flooding, and erosion
- Productive habitat for diverse wildlife, fish, and plants
- Sustaining socioeconomically important activities (i.e. fishing and hunting)

The Maurepas project will reconnect the swamp with the Mississippi River and increase resiliency by improving forest growth and water quality, maintaining low salinity levels, and increasing sediment and freshwater input.

Using the Maurepas project as mitigation for the WSLP project is the best option to provide both protection and restoration in this region.

