



LOUISIANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

"... conserving our natural resources and your right to enjoy them."

affiliated with



Resolution No. 8B, 2012

SUBJECT: WEST BAY DIVERSION CLOSURE

WHEREAS, the West Bay Sediment Diversion is an uncontrolled diversion of sediment and freshwater from the Mississippi River in Plaquemines Parish into an area west of the river called West Bay, located south of Venice, approximately 4.7 miles above Head of Passes near the area known as "Pilottown," that diverts as much as 50,000 cubic feet per second of sediment-laden water from the river during peak river flows, and

WHEREAS, the West Bay Diversion was approved by the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) Task Force during Priority Project List 1 (PPL 1) in 1992, was one of the first projects approved by the CWPPRA Task Force and was sponsored by the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and then the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources and now the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA), and

WHEREAS, the West Bay Diversion was not constructed until 2003 at an estimated cost of approximately \$51 million and was estimated to nourish approximately 9,800 acres of degraded wetlands on the west side of the Mississippi River, most of which had converted to open water over the last 50 or more years, as well as create new islands and emergent wetlands typical of sub-delta formation similar to other crevasses along the lower Mississippi River, and

WHEREAS, during the engineering and design phase of the West Bay Sediment Diversion, the Corps identified that the alteration of the river channel in the area near the West Bay Diversion could possibly lead to "induced shoaling" of the river channel or the Pilottown Anchorage, an area used by deep-water vessels to anchor adjacent to the main river channel during times of heavy river traffic or adverse weather conditions, and

WHEREAS, representatives of the navigation industry and the Corps expressed concern that the possible induced shoaling in the river channel and/or anchorage would negatively affect safe harbor and travel in the lower Mississippi River, and

WHEREAS, the Corps determined, based on Congressional statute for maintenance of the lower river channel, it could not legally dredge and maintain an anchorage area, only the main navigation channel, and

WHEREAS, an agreement was signed between the Department of Natural Resources (CPRA) and the Corps, with guidance from the navigation industry, stating the CWPPRA program would be responsible for paying the entire cost for dredging of any shoaling of the anchorage should such shoaling occur, and

WHEREAS, representatives of the navigation industry stated repeatedly prior to 2010 that the West Bay Diversion was a failure and demanded that it be closed because it was not building land in the outfall area and was causing siltation in the Pilottown Anchorage, and

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WHEREAS, hydrologic and bathymetric studies of the lower Mississippi conducted by the CPRA showed that the lower river has been silting in for more than 25 years due to natural and man-made changes in the river's channel below Venice, that the shoaling in the Pilottown Anchorage had been taking place for more than a decade prior to the opening of the West Bay Diversion, that the diversion was causing less than 20 percent of the shoaling in the Pilottown Anchorage and that the shoaling would continue even after closure of the diversion, rendering the anchorage useless without routine maintenance dredging, and

WHEREAS, subsequent studies conducted by the Corps concluded the CPRA's findings concerning the lower river and the West Bay Diversion's impact on shoaling to be accurate, and

WHEREAS, because of the agreement signed making CWPPRA responsible for all of the dredging costs regardless of the share of the shoaling caused by West Bay, the navigation industry demanded CWPPRA meet the provisions of the agreement signed and pay for the entire cost of dredging the Pilottown Anchorage despite findings that only a small percentage of the shoaling has been/is being caused by the diversion, and

WHEREAS, the CPRA offered to work with the navigation industry to relocate the Pilottown Anchorage to a more sustainable and suitable location, and that offer was rejected by the navigation industry, and

WHEREAS, the CPRA and the CWPPRA Task Force voted to pay the full expense to dredge the Pilottown Anchorage twice since 2008 at a cost of approximately \$10 million per dredging event, and

WHEREAS, the CWPPRA Task Force, with reluctant support from the CPRA, voted in January 2010 to close the West Bay Diversion due to the costs associated with dredging the anchorage because it threatened the sustainability of the CWPPRA program as a whole, which has an overall budget of approximately \$80 million per year, and

WHEREAS, following record-high levels in the Mississippi River from the years 2008-2011, as well as placement of sediment dredged from the anchorage in the outfall area of the West Bay Diversion, it has been demonstrated that the diversion is building land in its outfall area, with approximately 25 acres emerging in 2011 and studies conducted by the National Audubon Society and other groups showing more emergent land is likely following subsequent flooding events, and

WHEREAS, the navigation industry is now in favor of keeping the West Bay Diversion open because it is building land, but still insists the CWPPRA program pay for the entire cost of dredging the Pilottown Anchorage, and

WHEREAS, the CWPPRA Task Force in its January 2011 meeting voted not to block the closure of the West Bay Diversion and keep the scheduled closure in approximately Summer 2013 at a cost of approximately \$30 million to the CWPPRA program, and

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WHEREAS, Louisiana's coast is losing approximately 16-20 square miles of coastal wetlands and other coastal habitats per year and has lost approximately 1900 square miles of those lands in the last 80 years and is experiencing the fastest rate of land loss in the world, and

WHEREAS, diversions of sediment from the Mississippi River system are widely accepted as one of the few sustainable methods to reverse this dire coastal land loss, and

WHEREAS, the CPRA lists several sediment diversion projects as essential to coastal wetland sustainability and possibly a reversal of coastal land loss over the next 50 years in its latest "Louisiana's Comprehensive Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast".

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Louisiana Wildlife Federation ardently disagrees with the decision to close the West Bay Diversion, especially in light of the fact it is creating emerging, sub-delta habitat necessary to sustain Louisiana's coastal estuaries and protect coastal communities, and urgently requests the diversion remain open.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Louisiana Wildlife Federation urges the navigation industry, the CPRA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other member agencies of the CWPPRA Task Force to revisit the outdated agreement which places full financial responsibility for the dredging of the Pilottown Anchorage solely on the CWPPRA program, despite overwhelming evidence the diversion is causing only a small percentage of the siltation in the anchorage area and that this siltation will continue even after closure of the West Bay Diversion.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the concerns raised by the operation and study of the West Bay Diversion regarding the precipitous and continual shoaling of the lower Mississippi River between Venice and Head of Passes be more formally addressed by the Corps, and that Congress revisit outdated statutes and practices regarding the management of the lower Mississippi River and make the changes necessary in funding and law to reflect the dynamic nature of the lower river, the urgent need for its resources to be used to restore Louisiana's imperiled coastal habitats and especially the need to beneficially use materials dredged from the Mississippi River for navigation purposes to help rebuild Louisiana's coastal wetlands and other habitats.

Adopted by the Louisiana Wildlife Federation in Convention Assembled, March 11, 2012 in Covington, Louisiana.

The Louisiana Wildlife Federation is a statewide conservation education and advocacy organization with more than 10,000 members and 26 affiliate groups. Established in 1940, it is affiliated with the National Wildlife Federation and represents a broad constituency of conservationists including hunters, fishers, campers, birders, boaters, and other outdoor enthusiasts.