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Louisiana and National Conservation Groups Praise Obama Administration for New Cooperative Effort to Restore Louisiana and Mississippi Coastal Wetlands

Effort Reinforces President's Pledge to Restore Natural Hurricane Barrier on Eve of Katrina Anniversary

(Washington, DC – August 28, 2009) – On the eve of the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, Louisiana and national environmental groups today praised the Obama administration for [announcing](#) a new interagency working group to restore the coasts of Louisiana and Mississippi.

The severity of Katrina's damage – [nearly \\$90 billion in property damage alone](#) -- was caused, in part, by the fact that Louisiana has lost 1/3 of its original wetlands – about 2,000 square miles -- an area larger than Delaware. Yet, four years after Katrina, Congress has been unable to fund major coastal restoration projects it authorized in the 2007 Water Resources Development Act because the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has not completed the projects' design and engineering.

“The pace of restoration has not matched the urgency of the situation,” said Steven Peyronnin, executive director of the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana. “We are hopeful that the Administration will breathe new life into restoration efforts that are crucial to protecting the people of Coastal Louisiana.”

According to the Administration: “The group will enable federal agencies, working with state and local governments and other regional stakeholders, to come together and develop a strategy to increase both the economic and environmental resiliency of the region. This working group will serve as a pilot for addressing the effects of climate change in other coastal regions.”

“Just as it requires a team of doctors with different expertise to perform major surgery, it will require a team of experts with different skills from multiple agencies to restore the coastal wetlands of Louisiana and Mississippi,” said Mary Kelly, senior counsel of the Center for Rivers and Deltas at Environmental Defense Fund. “We applaud the administration for renewing President Obama's [commitment](#) 'to restore nature's barriers - the wetlands, marshes and barrier islands that can take the first blows and protect the people of the Gulf Coast.'”

“As things stand, coastal Louisiana is disappearing and faces increasing threats from climate change,” said Susan Kaderka, director of the National Wildlife Federation's South Central Regional office. “The Obama Administration has signaled that it is keeping its promises to the people of the Gulf Coast.”

Coastal Louisiana is home to critical energy production infrastructure, the busiest port in North America by volume, and huge commercial and recreational fisheries. Disruption of these industries because of storm damage could severely disrupt the national economy. Katrina destroyed infrastructure and damaged critical refineries so severely that some of them were out of service for a year, leading to a spike in the price of gasoline.

“The situation in coastal Louisiana is one of national and international concern,” said Brian Moore, director of Budget and Appropriations for the National Audubon Society. “This new announcement from the Obama administration recognizes the urgency under which we are operating and replaces what has been largely rhetoric with action. We are all very excited to get to work to restore this world class ecosystem.”

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