



State of Louisiana
Coastal Protection and Restoration
Authority

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CPRA Releases Draft Initial Operations Plan for Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion Permitting Process

April 4, 2017 – Earlier today, officials from Louisiana’s Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) briefed officials from a variety of local, state, and federal agencies regarding a draft initial operations plan for the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion. A cornerstone project of Louisiana’s Coastal Master Plan, the sediment diversion is key to a long-term sustainable strategy to reduce land loss rates and sustain wetlands that were injured by the *Deepwater Horizon oil spill*. This draft initial operations plan is a key component of the permitting process as it will be used to understand the project impacts, both positive and negative, including an assessment of how water levels, salinity, and wetlands may change in the Barataria Basin.

“We know the basin is changing with or without this project – our goal is to operate this sediment diversion in a manner that most-efficiently delivers sediment from the river to rebuild our wetlands for future generations to enjoy,” said CPRA Chairman Johnny Bradberry.

The State of Louisiana’s proposed Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion is intended to achieve the greatest possible wetland restoration results while minimizing other effects on Mississippi River and Barataria Basin resources. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) serves as the lead federal permitting agency for the project in accordance with Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Appropriation Act of 1899. GEC, Inc. was selected as the contractor to conduct the third party Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project in coordination with the USACE.

“Transparency is a core value of CPRA and we feel it is important to keep the public updated on the permitting process for this keystone restoration project. We plan to provide more information as it becomes available and we are proceeding as expeditiously and judiciously as we can, given the crisis our coast is facing,” said CPRA Chairman Johnny Bradberry.

In November 2016, CPRA was awarded funds for the engineering, design, and permitting effort from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund, which allows its dollars to be used only for diversions or barrier island projects.

The Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion will be the first controlled sediment diversion which reconnects and reestablishes the natural or deltaic sediment deposition process between the Mississippi River and the Barataria Basin. This restoration project will provide sediment, water, and nutrients to the basin in



order to build, maintain, and sustain the wetlands, complementing the billions of dollars that have been or will be invested in other coastal restoration and protection projects within the Barataria Basin. During

peak operations, it is anticipated the proposed project would significantly advance efforts to restore vital wetlands by discharging up to 75,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) of sediment laden Mississippi River water into the Barataria Basin.

Within the EIS process, this project, also referred to as the Proposed Action, will be compared to an analysis called the No Action Alternative, conducted to understand what future changes will happen in the basin *without* the proposed project action. As part of the EIS process, adverse impacts that are identified may lead to changes to the project in order to avoid, minimize, or mitigate these potential impacts.

The framework for the draft initial operations plan was based on the State's goal of restoring natural processes and achieving long-term sustainability, which resulted in an analysis to maximize the delivery of river sediment while minimizing the amount of fresh water entering the receiving basin. Higher sediment concentrations of river water occur as the river rises, especially during the earlier river peaks which typically occur in the winter and spring. In that context, the draft initial operations plan envisions operation of the diversion when the Mississippi River reaches a discharge of 450,000 cfs at Belle Chasse, which happens when the river stage is approximately 10-11 feet at the local gauge; and when the river discharge falls below 450,000 cfs at Belle Chasse, the diversion structure would mostly close and only allow a base flow of up to 5,000 cfs in order to benefit existing and newly created wetlands, to maximize vegetation sustainability, and to accommodate future environmental changes.

"It is important to note that while the diversion project is being designed to discharge up to 75,000 cfs, this maximum capacity would only occur during the infrequent instances when the Mississippi River is flowing at high river stages of approximately 1,000,000 cfs or more, which would be about 16-17 feet at the Belle Chasse gauge," says CPRA Sediment Diversion Program Manager Brad Barth.

This draft initial operations plan is the start of the operations discussion for the EIS and it is anticipated that it will change with the life of the project. In order to help reduce uncertainty over time and adjust for the ever-changing environment, an adaptive management plan is being developed. The adaptive management plan will monitor the structure and the environment to allow for variable flow rates in response to seasonal, sediment, and environmental conditions to maximize the benefits of sediment transport for restoration.

Public Scoping meetings, anticipated to take place this summer, are a critical part of the EIS process and will allow citizens and stakeholders to provide feedback to the USACE on the proposed Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion and the draft initial operations plan. More information on the projects and potential benefits and impacts will be available before the Public Scoping meetings.

For more information on the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion, visit <http://coastal.la.gov/our-work/key-initiatives/diversion-program/>.

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Louisiana's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority is the single state entity with authority to develop, articulate, implement, and enforce a comprehensive coastal restoration and protection Master Plan of unified



vision to reduce hurricane storm surge flood impact, to restore our bountiful natural resources, to build land to protect our nation's critical energy infrastructure, and to secure Louisiana's coast now and for future generations.