



## ICYMI: In Case You Missed It

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## CPRA head responds to anti-diversion claims

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In the wake of statements and accusations made during a public meeting led by Plaquemines Parish commercial fishermen opposing the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion, the volley of rebuttals has begun.

Johnny Bradberry, executive assistant to the Governor for coastal activities and chair of the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, called The Gazette last week to respond to some of those statements and accusations. Coincidentally, Bradberry is scheduled to speak at the May 22 Plaquemines Association of Business & Industry luncheon.

To begin, Bradberry offered a quick glimpse of his personal history with the coast to make the point that the CPRA isn't some out-of-touch bureaucracy. The Grand Isle native said he's been an oyster fish-

erman, so he can relate to the fishermen's concerns. He said he's also worked for oil and gas companies, drilled wells in the gulf and designed drilling platforms.

"I think I can relate to people across the coast," said Bradberry.

From there he pivoted to the multiple layers of government agencies—primarily the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers—overseeing the CPRA and the "more than 70 environmental laws" the agency must comply with just to receive permitting for Mid-Barataria Diversion. The anti-diversion group pointed to the April decision by the Corps to accelerate permitting for the diversion from 2022 to 2020 as a tacit exemption from many of those regulations. Bradberry characterized it as a challenge, saying the CPRA must now streamline its efforts to meet all the "70 laws" in a shorter period of time.

"If the CPRA does not

comply with the law, we will not be able to do the job," he said.

And they'll have to show their work, too. Both Plaquemines President Amos Cormier III, who spoke at the anti-diversion meeting, and the commercial fishing group have accused the CPRA of denying parish government and the seafood industry a seat at the table during diversion planning. Bradberry counters that the CPRA has held 41 total meetings in Plaquemines Parish, some with government officials, and 21 meetings open to the general public. In private and public meetings, Bradberry said the Plaquemines Parish Government and commercial seafood representatives have had ample opportunity to weigh in on the process.

"Plaquemines government made no official comments during the scoping

# CPRA

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period. They were not present," said Bradberry.

He said they'll get more chances after the CPRA issues its Environmental Impact Statement in 2019, which will require a whole new round of public feedback. Bradberry said the EIS will demonstrate how the CPRA is working within the framework of the "70 laws." He added that it will also address many of the anti-diversion group's concerns (effects on local population, socioeconomics, navigation, flooding, seafood), which they've accused the CPRA of ducking. But Bradberry addressed a few of those concerns, which he labeled "misconceptions," himself.

Concern: "Spin and marketing, not science, are driving the case for the diversion."

Bradberry said the CPRA settled on diversions as the most effective weapon against coastal erosion based on years of science contributed and vetted by "the best and brightest (scientists) across the country and the world." He expects much of that science to be validated in the EIS. The anti-diversion group has touted studies by LSU scientists which they say contradict the science being used by the

CPRA.

"The science we tap is, I believe, from a much bigger base and has more credibility compared to the science base of our detractors," said Bradberry.

Concern: "The river carries pollutants which will negatively impact wetlands."

Bradberry said the LDEQ is using national Environmental Protection Agency guidelines which designate the stretch of river where the diversion will be located as a safe source of drinking water and already feeds some healthy stretches of marshland.

"I'm not saying there are no pollutants, but to say they will negatively impact wetlands is a misconception," he said.

Concern: "The CPRA is ignoring dredging and focusing only on diversions."

"The CPRA is fully committed to dredging. Over the next 15 years we plan to spend nearly \$2 billion to dredge 200 million cubic yards of sediment. That does not address the sediment starvation and does not provide the sustainability of a diversion," said Bradberry. "We will strategically place some dredging projects near sediment diversions to capitalize on the synergistic relationship. A great portion of the \$50 billion Master Plan, around 40 percent of

that money, is tagged for dredging."

Concern: "The construction of the diversion will damage parish infrastructure."

"As part of this project, various utilities are going to need relocation. That's accounted for in the project budget and will be led by the contractor with minimal hassle to parish residents," said Bradberry. "To cut a channel, we will have to cut Highway 23, so a bridge will need to be built. It will be state of the art and we'll make sure the size of the bridge will accommodate traffic. All those costs are in the project with no tax dollars. It's fully funded by the BP Deep Water Horizon settlement."

Concern: "The diversion will be open year-round."

Bradberry said the river will be monitored "24/7/365" and that the diversion will only be opened when the sediment load is the heaviest or the river is flowing above 450,000-feet-per-second.

"That's when we're going to tap it and flow it through the basin," said Bradberry. "The plan will accommodate for uncertainty and adaptation to make sure it accomplishes its goals. But it will only be open on an intermittent basis."

Soil Borings

Via a 2014 ordinance "prohibit(ing) the granting of any permits in Plaquemines Parish regarding the constructing, development or implementation of additional freshwater/sediment diversion projects," Cormier has denied the CPRA's permit requests to take soil borings from the land where the diversion is planned. Bradberry said the borings are routine and "done all the time along the river by a lot of people," but, at the same time, are crucial for the EIS to proceed.

"If we're going to determine impacts, we have to know how we will design the diversion. How wide will the channel be, intake, strength data. Can it sustain what we want it to do?" said Bradberry. "We cannot answer their concerns about mitigation unless we go through the EIS process. It's like negotiating something you know nothing about."

Bradberry said the CPRA is making every effort to work with the PPG, including meetings with individual council members, to avoid finding a legal route around the local government.

"We would rather let them be a part of the process that they haven't engaged in. To help us help answer their questions," said Bradberry.