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Contact: coastal@la.gov

Louisiana Launches Search for National Estuarine Research Reserve Site

BATON ROUGE, LA – Louisiana has formally launched its search for a site to serve as a National Estuary Research Reserve (NERR). The NERR system is a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) program operated in partnership with coastal and Great Lake states for long-term research, education, and restoration. The current system is made up of 29 designated estuaries representative of the distinct estuary types found across the nation.

Gov. John Bel Edwards noted, “As the only Gulf coast state without a NERR, and thus the only Gulf state not sharing in the benefits of the system, I am delighted to bring the NERR program to Louisiana so we can showcase not only our unique deltaic system to the rest of the nation but also our determined and extensive efforts to restore and protect it.”

In July of 2019, Gov. Edwards sent a letter of interest to NOAA announcing Louisiana’s intent to host a NERR and identified Louisiana Sea Grant as the agency to lead the search. In December of 2019, NOAA accepted the request.

Dr. Robert Twilley, the executive director of Louisiana Sea Grant, described what a Louisiana NERR could add to the state at the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority Board meeting on Wednesday, December 9, 2020.

“NERR sites bring the benefit of federal support to state driven applied science, monitoring, education and outreach activities. This also may include education and research facilities, public access improvements like nature trails, boat launches and overnight accommodations,” he said.

NOAA staff described the system of NERRs around the country and the benefits they provide to host states to the CPRA Board. Kristin Ransom, a Senior Coastal Management Specialist on contract to the NOAA Office of Coastal Management and the local NOAA representative who is helping to guide Sea Grant through the process, outlined the valuable programming that a NERR brings to states including system-wide monitoring, coastal training, K-12 education, research fellowships, and science collaboration.

She said, “The State is responsible for the land ownership and management, hiring staff, and implementing these value-added programs, but 70% of the funding comes from the federal government. In addition to federal funding, our role is to provide guidance and technical assistance while coordinating across the system.”

Bren Haase, Executive Director of the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, supported the effort saying, “A NERR site in Louisiana is yet another initiative that shows Louisiana’s commitment to finding practical solutions to restore, and promoting access to our coastal areas. We look forward to working with our partners in identifying the ideal site in Louisiana.”

Louisiana Sea Grant has launched its public roadshow to educate coastal stakeholders about the program. Two public webinars will be held on Wednesday, December 9 from 3 to 4:30 pm and 5:30 to 7 pm. For more information about the meetings, visit <http://www.laseagrant.org/2020/lanerr-public-webinars/>.

For more information on the search for a NERR site in Louisiana, visit <http://www.laseagrant.org/deltanerr/>.

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