

Greater New Orlear

2017 Master Plan rewrite gets mostly favorable reception in N.O.



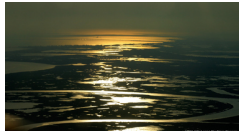
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on January 18, 2017 at 9:48 PM, updated January 19, 2017 at 5:25 PM

Louisiana's proposed 2017 rewrite of its **\$50 billion, 50-year coastal protection and restoration Master Plan** got a mostly warm reception at a public hearing in New Orleans on Wednesday evening (Jan. 18), although some commenters did raise serious questions about Plaquemines and St. Bernard parish coastal restoration and levee projects that were not included.

And several commenters among the crowd of about 250 people who attended the hearing in the Port of New Orleans auditorium raised concern that, while the rewrite reflects a desire by state officials to speed construction of many restoration projects during plan's first 10 years, rising seas and subsidence may be outstripping the plan's abilities to save at least some of the state's rapidly eroding coastline.



\$8.3 billion less annual surge damage seen in new coast plan



The \$50 billion plan to save Louisiana's coast gets a rewrite

Johanna de Graffenreid, representing the New Orleans-based Gulf Restoration Network, also urged officials with the state Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, who oversee the plan, to focus scarce money proposed for so-called "nonstructural" projects -- voluntarily raising homes in 100-year floodplains or providing money to buy the homes and relocate residents where house-raising is not feasible -- on those most at-risk and with low incomes.

She said such residents shouldn't have to compete with those with greater incomes, whose relocation may result in greater economic gains to the state in the future.

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The concerns about Plaquemines Parish centered on what parish officials consider a state decision to write off the lower half of the parish because it is subsiding more quickly and more likely to be adversely affected by rapidly increasing sea level rise.

Under the rules of the public hearing, state officials did not respond to the comments. However, in past discussions, officials have pointed out that the process used to choose individual projects weighed both the ability of the project to withstand natural forces, such as sea level rise and subsidence, and their ability to add protections to areas with greater population. The result, they said, was that some projects closer to the Gulf of Mexico were outscored by those further inland.

At the same time, state officials point out that Plaquemines Parish has benefited from the Army Corps of Engineers' use of material dredged from the lower Mississippi River to rebuild wetlands in both Pass a Loutre Wildlife Management Area and the Delta National Wildlife Refuge.

Plaquemines and other coastal parishes also have the opportunity to develop their own projects, using money they will receive directly from the federal Restore Act, which provides a small share of the federal Clean Water Act fines paid by BP and its drilling partners to all coastal parishes. The state also has set aside \$100 million of its own Clean Water Act fine money as a matching fund for projects the parishes propose that either are included in the Master Plan or meet the plan's goals.

The concern raised about the plan's treatment of St. Bernard Parish concerns the state's decision not to include a proposal already approved by the Army Corps of Engineers to spend more than \$1 billion to restore wetlands along the now-closed Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet.

Amanda Moore with the National Wildlife Federation pointed out that the plan does include proposals to rebuild wetlands along the New Orleans East Land Bridge and in the Central Wetlands Unit and Golden Triangle areas adjacent to Lake Borgne. However, those are projects that the state plans to pay for with one or another of the streams of money it will receive as a result of the BP oil spill.

The state is awaiting a ruling by the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals of its lawsuit against the corps over the MR-GO restoration plan, in which the state claims that Congress required the corps to pay the full cost of the project. The corps contends that the state must pay 35 percent of the cost, as is required for other water resource projects. While a lower court ruled in favor of the state, the case was appealed by the Justice Department and is still under consideration.

John Lopez, senior scientist for the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, was one of several commenters who warned that nature is outstripping the state's ability to move forward with construction of projects included in the Master Plan.

"Next year is the 300th anniversary of New Orleans," Lopez said. "Right now, it's not clear there will be a 400th-year anniversary of New Orleans."

Greg Gasperez, a New Orleans environmental engineer who was assistant secretary of the state Department of Environmental Quality in the 1980s, warned both during the hearing and during an earlier meeting of the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority in Baton Rouge that state officials must begin to address the causes of climate change that -- human-caused increases in the amount of carbon in the atmosphere -- are driving sea level rise.

Gasperez said that because of the lengthy time needed to develop the modeling used to test projects included in the state plan, it does not capture the most recent estimates of sea level rise. One recent study concluded that there could be 3 feet of sea rise during the 21st century, while another says that because of the collapse of polar ice caps, the rise could be as much as 6 feet.

The plan uses estimates of 2.07 feet over 50 years for a moderate 50-year sea level rise scenario, and 2.72 feet for a high, worst-case scenario.

Bren Haase, who oversees the Master Plan program for the CPRA, pointed out during Wednesday's earlier meeting that the state estimate is significantly higher than the high estimate used in the 2012 version of the plan, which was only 1.48 feet at the end of 50 years.

Haase also explained that while the state predicts that implementation of its plan will result in 802 square miles of land and wetlands created or maintained under a medium scenario, and 1158 square miles under the high scenario, the state would still see a loss of 2,000 square miles of wetlands over the 50-year period.

The decision to continue support for two major sediment diversion projects along the Mississippi River just south of New Orleans, while dropping plans for two diversions at more southerly locations received a luke-warm response from Capt. George Ricks, president of the Save Louisiana Coalition, which represents a number of fishers and oyster growers.

Ricks thanked state officials for dropping plans for the Lower Barataria and Lower Breton sediment diversions, but warned that oyster growers in St. Bernard Parish would still see major damage caused by the proposed Upper Breton diversion.

Two more hearings on the Master Plan, and on the draft fiscal year 2018 annual plan, which acts as the budget for Master Plan projects, are on tap:

- **Houma** -- Jan. 24, Houma-Terrebonne Civic Center, Pelican Room, 346 Civic Center Blvd.
- **Mandeville** -- Jan. 25, David C. Treen Instructional Technology Center, Conference Center, 2024 Livingston St.

Comments on the Master Plan can be submitted by email to masterplan@la.gov or regular mail to The Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, P.O. Box 44027, Baton Rouge, LA 70804.

If submitting feedback via email or regular mail, please specify that your comments are regarding the DRAFT 2017 Coastal Master Plan.

Comments also can be [submitted online](#). All comments must be received or postmarked by March 26.

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