

Expert Panel on River Diversions Issues Report and Recommendations to CPRA

LAFITTE, LA. – Oct 19, 2016 – The Expert Panel on Diversion Planning and Implementation (Panel), an independent group organized at the request of the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) by The Water Institute of the Gulf to advise the State on planning and implementing river diversion projects on the Mississippi and Atchafalaya rivers, has issued its seventh report and provided an update on its progress to the CPRA Board.

The Panel is comprised of 12 members from a variety of backgrounds, including physical and biological sciences, social science and engineering, all with experience involving coastal restoration projects. The Panel, formed in 2014, was created to provide independent, objective, and real-time advice to CPRA as work is performed to advance the scientific understanding and the assessment of risk and uncertainty of river diversion projects.

To develop the seventh report, the Panel held a public meeting in Baton Rouge on August 31, 2016 with follow-up discussions on September 1, 2016. The meeting included an update from CPRA on recent activities and a response to the recommendations in the Panel's sixth report; results of extensive new simulations in the areas of land building and landscape change; an introduction to the approach to operations, adaptive management, and the decision-making process; a discussion on vegetation response to inundation; and a briefing on an evolving issue with Bottlenose Dolphins, a protected species in the Barataria Bay.

Recommendations in the report are in the broad areas of (1) operations and adaptive management, (2) wetland response to flooding, and (3) future science input as the process moves fully into the engineering and design phase. In addition to the recommendations stemming from the Panel's charge, the report offers numerous suggestions for applying the recommendations, and ends with a specific recommendation for elevating and advancing socio-economic considerations to a level appropriate for a restoration program of this magnitude. Given the transition to full engineering and design and environmental permitting, the Panel does not currently have plans to meet again.

“The Panel has appreciated the opportunity over the past three years to provide real-time advice and guidance to CPRA as it advanced these projects from planning to implementation. While there are always opportunities for improvement, we are impressed with the overall approach, the seriousness with which the State considered and worked to address our recommendations, and we wish them much success in addressing the challenges of the next phase,” said Panel Chairman John Wells, Ph.D., dean and director of the Virginia Institute of Marine Science.

“The State of Louisiana would like to thank the Panel for their invaluable advice and guidance over the years. Sediment diversion projects are a cornerstone of our Coastal Master Plan and given the complexity of these projects, it is paramount that we use the best available science to guide our decisions as we work diligently

and expeditiously to protect and restore our coast,” said CPRA Executive Director, Michael Ellis.

To learn more about the Panel and download its seventh report, please visit <http://thewaterinstitute.org/river-diversion-expert-advisory-panel>.

About The Water Institute of the Gulf

The Water Institute of the Gulf is a not-for-profit, independent research and technical services resource for resilient coasts and sustainable water systems worldwide. The work of the Institute helps ensure livable communities and a thriving economy and environment. For more information, visit www.thewaterinstitute.org.

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