

The Baton Rouge-based Water Institute of the Gulf today announced a new partnership with a Dutch research group to study coastal protection and restoration.

The Water Institute and Deltares of the Netherlands will focus on developing software, modeling watersheds, developing infrastructure and nature-based solutions to coastal protection and finding ways to support Louisiana's ambitious Coastal Master Plan. The state is currently battling a dramatic loss of coastal wetlands.

"We've reached a critical crossroads for preserving Louisiana's coastline and our very way of life there," Gov. John Bel Edwards says in a statement. "By combining forces with private research institutions, such as The Water Institute of the Gulf and Deltares, this (memorandum of understanding) will help us establish a beachhead for mission success."

The two institutes have been working under a limited partnership since the creation of the Water Institute in 2011, but the new agreement will expand the scope of work, according to a statement from Edwards' administration.

Louisiana recently updated its coastal plan, which calls for \$50 billion in restoration and protection projects over the next 50 years. But the federal permitting process has meant lengthy delays in those projects beginning, and funding for the entire plan is less than certain.

Edwards' administration sees water management as one of the most lucrative industries for stimulating the state's economy; the Water Campus in Baton Rouge could employ 4,000 people, and the sector could produce tens of thousands more, the statement says.

"Because of our unique geography and challenges in Louisiana, we have been forced to learn quickly about adaptation for the sake of survival," Water Institute President and CEO Justin Ehrenwerth says in a statement. "We have relied for years on the experience of and partnership with our colleagues at Deltares."