

Council on Watershed Management Meeting
Thursday, August 8, 2019, 1:30 PM

I. Called to Order by Pat Forbes at 1:30 PM

Welcome and opening comments

II. Council Member Roll Call:

Pat Forbes (OCD)

James Waskom (GOHSEP)

Jack Montoucet (LDWF)

Chris Knotts (DOTD)

Greg Grandy (CPRA)

III. Pledge of Allegiance

Led by Jack Montoucet, DOTD

IV. Public Comment

Public comments will be taken at the end of the meeting.

V. Consent Agenda Items

Approval of May 30, 2019 Meeting Minutes

Approved as written, with no opposition.

VI. Opening Remarks

A. Pat Forbes, OCD

In March and August 2016, Louisiana experienced two historic rain events that produced trillions of gallons of rainwater in various regions across the state. The rising floodwaters reached more than 145,000 homes, leaving behind an estimated \$10 billion in damage and resulting in recovery efforts that will take years to complete. These devastating events exposed key weaknesses in Louisiana's approach to floodplain management and risk-reduction planning at all levels of government. We all understand that—in this very important work—the status quo will not do.

Recognizing the emergence of watershed management as a preferred model to integrate physical, biological, ecological, socioeconomic, and policy concerns with a thorough understanding of an areas' hydrologic processes; Governor John Bel Edwards charged state agencies represented here today in May 2018 through an executive order to coordinate statewide floodplain management efforts through a watershed management approach in response to these Great Floods.

This effort includes the development of a statewide data and modeling program that can provide decision-makers throughout the state with the best science and data available, as well as resources to enhance planning, policy, project development, and outreach within

state agencies and local communities to build support for coordinated regional watershed management that can more effectively address mounting flood risks statewide. This effort is commonly referred to as the “Louisiana Watershed Initiative.”

On behalf of the Governor, thank you all for joining us today in support of this effort.

Before we begin today’s meeting. I’d also like to provide an update on one of the Initiative’s anticipated short-term funding sources: a 1.2 billion dollar Congressional funding allocation. At present, the state continues to await the guidance needed to both receive and distribute these funds. So, please allow me to be very clear on this point – we do not yet have the federal guidelines, nor the funding itself. We have continued to do everything in our power to prepare for the guidelines’ release, including attending a HUD week-long training (last week) to prepare grantees for anticipated mitigation requirements. Representation from multiple LWI agencies attended the training and the state remains ready to update and submit our Action Plan once the guidelines are posted. I believe representatives from DOTD similarly have an update on the statewide data and modeling program.

B. Statewide Modeling RFQs – Chris Knotts, DOTD

Thank you Pat, to recap a bit for those who may not be following this closely: In May of this year the State advertised a Request for Qualifications to perform H&H modeling services for the states’ 59 HUC8 watersheds. These watersheds were divided into 7 contract regions. These regions are different from those that will be presented later today. Organization of these 7 regions was primarily focused on facilitating procurement and expediting the modeling process. It will not have an impact on a regional model’s ability to align with boundaries discussed later today.

Regions 2, 3, 5 and 7

In terms of the ongoing procurement process: Advertisements for regions 2, 3, 5, and 7 were closed on June 17th. We have reviewed proposer’s qualifications for these regions and we posted short lists of proposers on the DOTD website on 8/16/19. Next steps include oral presentations, review of feedback, selections, and awards. As previously discussed, there will be an opportunity for local elected officials to provide input, we will be providing an update on this in the coming weeks.

Regions 1, 4 and 6

RFQs for regions 1, 4, and 6 remain open – due dates for these regions will be posted once award letters are issued for regions 2, 3, 5 and 7. This is necessary for firms to best understand their capacity to perform services in additional regions, should they be awarded work in regions 2, 3, 5 or 7.

I have been advised that the Data and Modeling TAG is currently finalizing guidance documents to assist selected contractors with developing a Scope of Work consistent with LWI minimum expectations. This guidance will be provided to contractors once all award letters have been distributed.

For full details and to access the advertisements, visit DOTD’s Advertisements & Addendums webpage, can be accessed by a link posted to the Watershed Initiative’s web, Facebook, and Twitter page. While advertisements are posted, state employees remain in a blackout period and may not address questions regarding the RFQs. Should you have questions, you must direct them through the appropriate channels, as advised in the RFQs. As such, we will

not be answering questions today, but are excited to see this work underway.

VII. Old Business

Alexandra Carter, OCD

As of this morning, we have concluded the public comment period on a few of our documents that were posted to the website. These include the materials you see listed on the slide, many of which are technical resources on data and modeling, and some of which are draft guiding documents for our outreach and engagement strategy and for the evaluation of projects. Thank you for your input for anyone who has posted, and we will begin working on ensuring these comments are reflected in the final versions of these documents.

VIII. New Business

Mr. Forbes: We will now walk through new business items, discussing and opening to the public before voting. If you approach and wish to provide public comments, please fill out the public comment cards provided.

A. Nomination of New Officers

Mr. Forbes: I would like to open the floor to council members to make nominations for the positions of Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

Mr. Waskom: I motion to re-elect Pat Forbes to the position of Chairman of the Council on Watershed Management.

Mr. Knotts: I second.

Mr. Forbes: With no opposition from the council, are there any public comments related to this item? Hearing none, let's move to Vice-Chairman.

Mr. Knotts: I motion to elect Jack Montoucet to the position of Vice-Chairman of the Council on Watershed Management.

Mr. Waskom: I second.

Mr. Forbes: With no opposition from the council, are there any public comments related to this item? Hearing none, we will move to the next item.

B. Establishment of Provisional Watershed Regions – Jeff Giering, GOHSEP / Alex Carter, OCD

Ms. Carter: The Planning TAG and the Working Group are presenting today regional watershed boundaries in order to enable implementation of short- and long-term initiative activities, including regional modeling, planning, and project funding. This recommendation aims to establish a regional scale from which the initiative's framework can successfully operate. If approved, it will enable stakeholders in each watershed region to more successfully collaborate across political jurisdictions and use best practices to reduce flood risk. In arriving at this recommendation, the Planning TAG and the Working Group considered scientific data and models, watershed-based planning objectives, existing organizational boundaries, and stakeholder input.

Mr. Giering: For instance, regarding scientific data and models, we considered the data that we already have from USGS and CPRA that detail the natural topography and hydrology, as well as the existing coastal flood dynamics. This is the why, for example, all of the

boundaries of the provisional watershed regions lie along HUC-8 lines. With regards to watershed-based planning objectives, we know that some projects or planning strategies have impacts beyond their immediate location, and often have impacts beyond the HUC-8 watershed they are located in. For this reason, we realized that we needed to enable planning efforts that span multiple HUC-8 watersheds and multiple jurisdictions, so that the regional stakeholders are best positioned to consider the broader, interconnected impacts of certain projects or strategies they may undertake. These stakeholders will also be able to leverage their resources, skills, and authority to enhance their collective watershed management capability. With regards to existing organizational boundaries, we considered parish boundaries, planning and development districts, levee boards, water and drainage districts, soil and conservation districts, and others. We recognized that in some areas, there are established working relationships among organizations that should be further enabled and supported through this work.

Ms. Carter: Our initial provisional boundary map was based on prior investigations and the goals in creating this map were to 1) use a regional management scale, 2) support the configuration of existing-resilience initiatives, 3) recognize existing levee districts and population centers, and 4) reflect places where we have a shared threat or similar water management challenges, such as coastal challenges.

Mr. Giering: We brought this first provisional map to the parishes and the regional stakeholders, and we received substantial feedback. We met with representatives from all 64 parishes, and we created an online survey to further enable feedback on this map. Overall, we heard general support for the provisional delineation. Keeping in mind that we recognize that we will never reach unanimous consensus, but are confident that this process successfully identified areas of concern. One concern centered around the size of the regions, as they reflect a larger scale than your typical parish boundary or a HUC-8 boundary. We also heard that parish leaders and regional stakeholders are excited and they are looking forward to embarking on regional coordination once these boundaries are established.

Ms. Carter: When we focused on the specific comments we received, we noticed that many stakeholders recognized that, although the regions are large, they are an appropriate configuration to enable regional and state-wide planning activities. We also heard some specific comments within regions. Stakeholders in Region 2 initially stated opposition to their regional configuration, however this was resolved with further discussion among stakeholders. Stakeholders in Region 8 pointed out that there are hydrologic distinctions between the north- and south-shore parishes, and that therefore the north shore parishes should be grouped with those parishes in Region 7, some of which share the hydrologic impacts of the Tangipahoa and Amite Rivers. Stakeholders in Regions 4 and 5 expressed varied opinions on where the Mermentau River Basin should fall, based on these comments, the Planning TAG recommended that the Mermentau be included in Region 5. We shifted a few lines, specifically in the area of Regions 4, 5, and 7 based on the feedback we received.

We believe that this provisional recommendation reflects a map that enables regional management, supports ongoing resilience initiatives, and considers existing levee districts and key population centers. We request that the Council adopt the Provisional Watershed Regions as proposed, in order to enable implementation of watershed initiative activities, specifically those that require regional coordination. We also offer the caveat that if, in implementation of the initiatives activities, regional stakeholders collectively find that their regional boundary does not appropriately fit their needs or that they would be best served by a sub-basin approach in some cases where appropriate, that the Initiative will try to enable amendments to this map if they are needed.

Mr. Forbes: First, are there any public comments related to this item?

1) Pat Brister, St. Tammany Parish President

2) Guy Cormier, Livingston Parish

3) Dietmar Rietschier, Amite River Basin Commission

Mr. Forbes: Is there any discussion amongst the Council? Hearing none, do I have a motion to adopt the Provisional Watershed Regions as proposed?

Motioned: Greg Grandy, CPRA

Seconded: Jack Montoucet, LDWF

Approved with no opposition.

C. Regional Capacity Building Grant Program Notice of Funding Availability

Ms. Carter: Before we walk through this program it is important to first acknowledge that it is not being funded by the \$1.2 billion congressional allocation, but from previous allocations associated with the 2016 storms. Only just recently in June were action plan amendments approved to make these funds available for LWI activities. This program has three main objectives that run concurrently over the lifespan of the grant and the larger LWI program. First, enable long-term regional watershed management structures that can effectively coordinate regional H&H model use, project prioritization and decision-making, and higher development standards. Second, enhance the capacity of local floodplain management and mitigation efforts. And thirdly, develop, maintain, and utilize a regional watershed project list. Overall, the LWI is attempting to stabilize water management efforts regionally, enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of ongoing efforts, and enable consistency of approach for the betterment of all.

Ms. Campo: To reach these goals, the grant provides \$400,000 to each region, over three years, on a non-competitive basis to help the members of these bodies complete tasks. Only political subdivisions are eligible applicants.

Ms. Carter: If you are planning to prepare an application for this program, coordination over the next few weeks and months will be critical. Only one application in each region will be accepted, so stakeholders will need to collaborate to identify a fiscal agent for the application. To reiterate, this fiscal agent must be a political subdivision, however the

program is flexible, so the applicant can design their proposal in a way that is tailored to their region's needs and can even present an organizational approach that utilizes multiple coordinating agencies or organizations within the region. This, I am sure, will seem like a lot of effort for \$400,000 over a three-year period, so let us be clear today, participation in this program will likely be a prerequisite to future LWI funding opportunities and represents the first of many methods to enable successful regional watershed management.

Ms. Campo: Some important dates to keep in mind include August 15, 2019, which is when the solicitation will be advertised. September 16, 2019 is the applicant briefing held at the LaSalle Building in Baton Rouge. We will be posting the solicitation, as well as the webinars and Q&A information on the website, and if anyone has questions about the program, as always, email us at watershed@la.gov.

Mr. Forbes: First, are there any public comments related to this item? Hearing none, is there a desire for discussion amongst the Council? Again, hearing none, do I have a motion to approve the release of a notice of funding availability for the regional capacity building grant program?

Motioned: Chris Knotts, DOTD

Seconded: James Waskom, GOHSEP

Approved with no opposition.

IX. Updates

Mr. Forbes: We have CPRA here to advise on Regional Steering Committee guidance.

A. Regional Steering Committee Guidance – Jeffery Giering, CPRA

Mr. Giering: The Planning TAG has drafted guidance on how the regional steering committees should be assembled, largely based on input from parish leadership and from best practices in international water management. Some consistent points include 1) it is appropriate to have one steering committee per region to enable coordination within the region, 2) steering committees should be apolitical, meaning they see beyond politics of the areas, 3) we need diverse representation and diverse perspectives including governmental representatives, local technical professionals, such as floodplain managers, engineers, etc., and community representatives on the steering committees.

B. LiDAR Collection and Processing

Mr. Forbes: Now we have Brad Doucet and Kurt Johnson, both with DOTD, to present and update on the LiDAR collection and processing.

C. Interstate Summit Report-Out – Ben Wicker, OCD

Mr. Wicker: The Louisiana Watershed Initiative held an Interstate Summit in June 2019 in Bossier City, LA. The goal of this summit was work with our neighboring states to share best practices and solve our shared watershed issues. The key takeaways from this summit included 1) we now know partners across state lines will need to be included in regional watershed activities, including regional steering committee

meetings and 2) the same level of enthusiasm we received from the parish leadership meetings was also expressed by our neighboring states.

X. Next Steps

Mr. Forbes: Any public comments before we move on to closing remarks?

1) Hampton Peele, Louisiana State University

Mr. Forbes: Any additional discussion amongst the council? Hearing none, let's move to closing remarks.

XI. Closing Remarks

XII. Adjournment

Mr. Forbes: Do I have a motion to adjourn?

Motioned: Chris Knotts, DOTD

Seconded: Jack Montoucet, LDWF

Mr. Forbes: Adjournment at 2:50 PM.