



Atchafalaya River Basin Restoration & Enhancement (ARBRE) Task Force

Thursday, August 12, 2021

9:00AM

Public meeting via Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88526497058?pwd=ay9abUtkZ0FQdzFhNXFCekZGQWJXUT09>

Passcode: ARBRE

The following constitute minutes of the Atchafalaya River Basin Restoration & Enhancement Task Force Meeting and are not a verbatim transcript of the proceedings. Audio and video recordings of the meetings are available for viewing and kept at the Office of the Governor-Coastal Activities Office in Baton Rouge, LA.

I. Call to Order: Bren Haase, Acting Chairman

II. Roll Call

- Acting Chairman Haase-Present, Adam Eitmann-Present, Mr. Myers-Present, Mr. Haydel-Absent, Mr. Rosso-Present, Mr. Milling-Present, Mr. L. Blanchard-Present, Mr. Tauzin-Present, Ms. Gautreaux-Present, Mr. Ashley-Present, Mr. Spinks-Absent, Mr. Murphy-Present, Mr. Wade-Present, Mr. Jewell-Absent, Mr. Meche-Present, Mr. Bonvillain-Present, Mr. Inman-Present, Ms. Taylor-Present, Mr. Paul-Absent, Mr. Constant-Present, Mr. Kroes/Rebich-Present

III. Approval of Minutes

Motion by Ms. Gautreaux
Second by Mr. Wade
Unanimously Approved

IV. Approval of Agenda

Motion by Ms. Gautreaux
Second by Mr. Russo
Unanimously Approved

V. Old Business/Announcements: Bren Haase, CPRA- Acting Chairman

VI. National Estuarine Research Reserve Update – Dr. Brian Roberts, LUMCON

(Video 0:7:50)

- Dr. Roberts briefed the Task Force on Five Programs Common to all NERR sites:
 - Stewardship, Monitoring, Research, Training and Education
- Informed the TF that there are a network of 29 Coastal sites designated to protect and study estuarine systems (with Connecticut and Wisconsin NERR sites in development)
- Task Force members were also given the breakdown of the site selection process: The state and NOAA shall evaluate and select the final site(s). NOAA has final authority in approving such sites. **Site selection shall be guided by the following principles:**
 - (1) The site's contribution to the biogeographical and typological balance of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System.



- **NOAA will give priority consideration to proposals to establish Reserves in biogeographic regions or sub-regions or incorporating types that are not represented in the system.**
 - (2) The site's ecological characteristics, including its biological productivity, diversity of flora and fauna, and capacity to attract a broad range of research and educational interests.
 - (3) Assurance that the site's boundaries encompass an adequate portion of the key land and water areas of the natural system to approximate an ecological unit and to ensure effective conservation
 - (4) The site's suitability for long-term estuarine research
 - (5) The site's compatibility with existing and potential land and water uses in contiguous areas as well as approved coastal and estuarine management plans
 - (6) The site's importance to education and interpretive efforts
- Task Force members were updated on how a Delta NERR Site is best designed:
 - **A Delta NERR should include: River and its alluvial floodplain, River Delta and Estuarine ecosystem**
- The Overall vision for and approach to the development of the Atchafalaya NERR Include all of the key habitats/ecosystems looked at in the NERR selection process with the idea being that the Atchafalaya basin provides a unique river delta NERR that encompasses all key relevant habitats found in Louisiana.
 - **The Atchafalaya Basin is essentially a microcosm of Louisiana representing all of the habitats found within the state and is a model for how the state and other deltaic systems are formed.**
- Proposed Atchafalaya NERR site would only require state lands
 - Alluvial Floodplain Zone
 - River Delta / Fresh Marsh Zone
 - Brackish / Salt Marsh Zone
- The NERR Site Selection Criteria Categories were discussed with the Task Force members
 - Environmental Representativeness
 - Value of the Site for Research, Monitoring, and Resource Protection
 - Suitability of the Site for Education and Interpretation
 - Acquisition and Management Considerations
 - Ability to Accommodate Climate Change
 - LA NERR Partnerships
- The NERR Selection Timeline:
 - May 13th: Phase I Site Proposals; July 14th: Phase II Site Proposals: September: Town Hall Meetings (all will be virtual due to COVID); Wednesday September 8th, 6 – 8 pm Tuesday September 14th, 12-2 pm; Thursday September 16th, 6 - 8 pm: Late October: Phase III (Final) *Draft* Site Proposals submitted; Late December: Final versions of Phase III Proposals submitted; January 2022: Nomination selection sent to Governor.



- Questions were raised from Task Force members to Dr. Roberts regarding the links for Town Hall meetings (Mr. Tauzin); Wildlife Management (Mr. Myers) and Fisheries (Mr. Meche) in which Dr. Roberts addressed.

VII. Recent USACE Modeling of the Atchafalaya River – Dr. Jim Lewis, USACE (Video 0:30:35)

- Dr. Lewis explained to the Task Force members the MS River and Tributaries project:
 - Federal involvement stepped in after the 1927 flood; it was authorized in the 1928 Flood Control Act; Comprehensive, unified system of public works within the lower Mississippi Valley that provides unprecedented flood risk management and an equally efficient navigation channel; System is designed to handle the project design flood (PDF); Atchafalaya River Basin is a very important part of the MR&T System.
- MR&T Flow line Assessment: Re-evaluation of the water surface elevations associated with the Project Design Flood for both the present conditions and for the next 50 years.
- Members were briefed on the HEC-Ras Model Domain and the AdH Model Domain (Hydraulic Models)
- The Adaptive Hydraulic Model
 - Focused on 2011 Morganza Floodway Opening
 - Model Developed by the USACE (ERDC)
 - A lot of data collection during 2011 USGS and others
 - Several reports on the validation of this model and its continued use
- HEC River Analysis System (RAS) Model
 - New Orleans District modeling approach with the RAS: Check out piece of model that is needed; Make improvements or refinements; Check-in the revisions and it can run simulations together as a system.
- Challenges to the Atchafalaya River
 - Degradation in the Upper Atchafalaya River
 - Upper Atchafalaya River has seen large declines in water surface over time, especially from the 1930s to the 1970s.
 - Have also seen bank caving in certain locations along the river.
 - Able to carry a lot more water at a lower water surface.
 - Aggradation in the Lower Atchafalaya River
 - Natural processes carry sediment from the watershed
 - Certain locations where sediment is more inclined to deposit
 - Lower Atchafalaya River has seen increasing water surfaces over time.
 - Sediment modeling shows continued increase into the future.
 - Relative Sea Level Rise
 - Largest influence at the lowest end of the river
 - Uncertainty about how much sea level rise
 - Important factor going into the future



- Changing flow distribution at Wax Lake Outlet
 - Constructed in 1941
 - Originally intended to be about 20%
 - Has gradually increased over time to carry more water
 - Sediment modeling projections show that it will continue gradually increasing
- Current Work
 - Investigating hydraulic efficiency of the Atchafalaya River outlets
 - Improve our understanding of the connections/dynamics of the Lower Atchafalaya
 - Calculate water surfaces for various conditions
- Questions were raised to Mr. Lewis by Task Force members regarding Lower/Upper River degradation (Chairman Haase); Do you consider in your studies the head difference in the MS River and Atchafalaya River? (Mr. Meche); Guide levee and flow to IGWW ...do they plan to model the east side of the basin? (Mr. L. Blanchard); Would Mr. Lewis be willing to have a side conversation to further discuss (Mr. Wade); what does he mean by “water surface” (Dean Wilson-public comment); Is the increase a result of the Delta (Mr. Linscombe-public comment) in which Mr. Lewis addressed.

VIII. ARBRE Task Force Recommendations to the CPRA Board – Brian Lezina, CPRA (Video: 30:53)

- Mr. Lezina went through the Initial Findings and Recommendations to the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority Board line by line with the members of the Task Force:
 - Enhance outreach that highlights the importance of the Atchafalaya Basin locally and nationally.
 - Function as a critical floodway
 - Ecological benefits
 - Environmental benefits
 - Request “State of Emergency” declaration
 - Urge and request Congress and request Congress fully fund construction of finalized USACE studies relevant to the management of the Atchafalaya Basin as well as fund authorized studies
 - Programs
 - Atchafalaya Floodway Projects 5 WMUs
 - MR&T Program and associated
 - Projects/Studies
 - South Central Coastal study
 - East Atchafalaya and Amite Basins
 - Nutrient assessments
 - Urge USACE to streamline permitting
 - Prioritize restoration of historic flows Butte Larose
 - Urge the USACE to approach management of the Atchafalaya Basin holistically, designating ecological restoration as a primary component along with flood



- control and navigation.
- Recognize equal importance of ecological restoration
 - All things benefit with appropriate management of sediment and water
 - USACE to include this holistic management approach in upcoming Lower Mississippi River Comprehensive Management Study
 - Urge Louisiana Legislature to include the Atchafalaya Basin as part of the Louisiana Coastal Zone
 - Currently within Louisiana Coastal Area
 - Recommends inclusion of areas not covered
 - Inclusion in Louisiana Coastal Resources Program
 - Regulatory requirements concerning environmental (CUP)
 - Additional funding opportunities
 - Parishes can develop CZMP
 - Management actions should where possible restore north/south sheet flow within the Basin
 - Restoration of “natural” flows
 - Development of spoil bank inventory
 - Identification and prioritization
 - Programmatic permit for soil bank gapping
 - Permit provisions and enforcement
 - Management actions should where possible restore and conserve deep water habitats within the Basin
 - Restoration deepwater areas
 - Limit ingress of sediment (modification, trapping, etc)
 - Explore alternate uses of sediment
 - Strategically place sediment on upland areas, north south, and as nourishment
 - Permit provisions and enforcement
 - Management actions should where possible restore and
 - Restoration deepwater areas
 - Limit ingress of sediment (modification, trapping, etc)
 - Explore alternate uses of sediment
 - Strategically place sediment on upland areas, north south, and as nourishment
 - Permit provisions and enforcement
 - Examine ways to better manage sediment within the ARB
 - USACE explore alternative dredging techniques, channel alignments, and channel maintenance
 - Limit ingress, mobilizes sediment for coastal needs



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- Assess the benefit of maintenance activities in River and outlets such as the Jaws and Wax Lake.
 - Hydrologic studies
 - Examine the current hydrology of the ARB, including management of the ORCC and the ARB channel outlets
 - Flow distribution changes at Old River
 - Understanding current dynamics
 - Update the State's Atchafalaya Basin Mater Plan to include current conditions and challenges informed by the ARBRE Task Force.
 - Update the 1998 Plan
 - Include information relevant to areas within and immediately adjacent to ARB guide levees
 - Establish a clearinghouse for studies and projects around the Basin
 - Address recreational access and navigation
 - CPRA Board and CPRA to enhance public engagement concerning the management of the Atchafalaya Basin
 - Increased meetings, collaboration, media updates for public access and collection of public comment

Navigational aids

 - Maps
 - Signage
 - Water level gauges
 - Recommend the ARBRE Task Force be used to discuss and inform potential management actions within the Atchafalaya Basin.
 - Recognizes the Task Force a diverse collection of stakeholders that can address management issues
 - Explore opportunities for significant recurring funding for the Atchafalaya Basin Program
 - Recognizes the limitations of current funding mechanism
 - Suggests revision to the threshold of current system
 - Exploration of federal options
 - Inland Waterway Use fee as suggested model
 - Timeline
 - Initial Meeting (March 2021)
 - Identify Problems and Solutions (April)
 - Focus on Implementation (May-June)
 - Report Drafting (July-August)
 - Final Report (September 2021)
 - Presentation to the CPRAB (Wed, September 15, 2021 @ 9:30a)
- The Task Force members had an open discussion regarding the plan and few expressed concerns regarding certain sections (spoil banks, permitting process etc.). Therefore, a motion



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was raised to have more time to clarify and tweak sections of the plan and reconvene the week of August 23rd.

- K. Gautreaux expressed the need to have more time to make edits/adjustments to the plan.
 - Motion made by: V. Blanchard
 - Motion 2nd by: R. Sparks
 - Unanimously Approved

Public Comment – *public comments may be made in person or submitted online at ARBRE@la.gov*

IX. Adjourn

Motion by Ms. Gautreaux
Second by Mr. Wade
Unanimously Approved