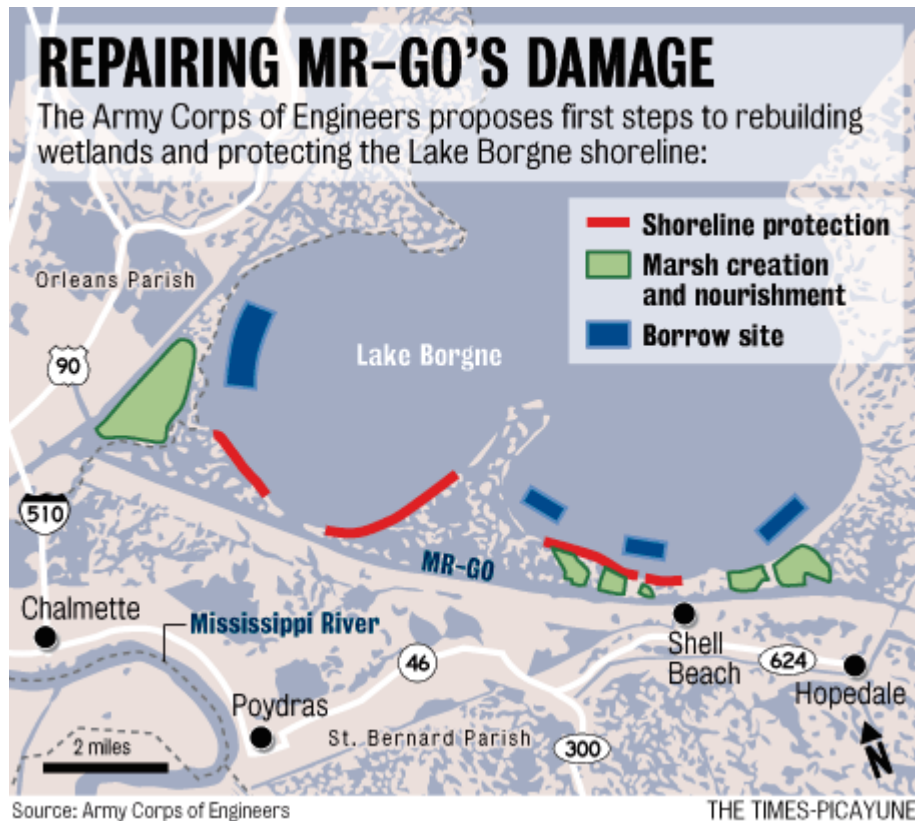


Corps to rebuild wetlands as part of MR-GO closure

Posted by [ccharpen](#) October 24, 2008 07:12AM

The Army Corps of Engineers has proposed spending \$66.4 million to rebuild wetlands along the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet and in Lake Borgne and also armor part of the lake's shoreline.



The projects are being paid for with money appropriated by Congress in 2005 to close the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet, but represent only a small part of expected efforts to reverse the erosion caused by the 40-year-old shipping shortcut to the Industrial Canal.

The restoration plans are the preferred alternative contained in a draft environmental impact statement released this week by the corps. After a 45-day public comment period, corps officials will update the environmental statement and submit it to Congress.

Construction could begin within 18 months, officials said.

The plan is divided into three projects, each of which will take about 18 months to complete, and are expected to be built in succession:

-- The first project would use limestone rock to armor the shoreline of Lake Borgne at Shell Beach, with material dredged from within the lake brought in to rebuild wetlands between the shoreline and the MR-GO.

-- Next, the corps would use rock to protect the lake shoreline in two stretches at Bayous Dupre and Bienvenue.

-- The final project would fill in open water areas on the northwest side of the "golden triangle," an area of wetlands sandwiched between the MR-GO and the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway. That project would be

completed last to coordinate with the construction of a storm-surge barrier across the triangle that is part of the corps's "100-year" levee improvements, designed to protect the New Orleans area from surge caused by hurricanes with a 1 percent chance of occurring in any year.

The corps announced Thursday that it had authorized Shaw Environmental and Infrastructure Inc. to prepare for construction of the barrier and levee project, clearing the way for it to begin staging equipment and supplies in the area.

Some land acquisition in the footprint of the barrier project must still be completed, corps officials said.

Corps environmental manager William Klein said the triangle wetlands-restoration project will be coordinated with similar wetlands improvement measures in that area that are designed to mitigate the environmental effects of building the barrier. Soil dredged in the location of the barrier will be spread in open-water areas.

The three-part MR-GO restoration project also is being coordinated with two Breaux Act wetland restoration projects already being designed or under construction in the area.

Restoring the wetlands

The corps also has embarked on a broader study of how to restore wetlands and land features lost to erosion caused by ships and barges using the MR-GO and by construction of the ill-fated shipping channel itself.

That study was authorized by the 2007 Water Resources Development Act, but Congress must still approve and appropriate money for any projects it recommends.

The 2007 water act also ordered deauthorization of the MR-GO as a navigation channel. A \$24.7 million rock dike is to be built across the channel at Bayou la Loutre in St. Bernard Parish by June 1, 2009.

The corps already has spent about \$5 million of the \$75 million appropriated by Congress in 2005 for a small wetlands-restoration project and some armoring along the MR-GO.

There also is a federal-state plan to build a diversion of Mississippi River water near Violet to help restore wetlands in the area. That project would be financed under other federal and state programs.

This first MR-GO restoration project was delayed until this year in part by arguments between the corps and U.S. Sen. David Vitter, R-La., over whether the money approved by Congress should be used for restoration or for maintenance of the shipping channel. Vitter, supported by U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., and other members of the state's congressional delegation, added language to a 2006 supplemental appropriation specifying the money be spent on restoration.

Additional delays resulted when the navigation channel was deauthorized, requiring changes in the environmental assumptions underlying the restoration projects.

Safety, species concerns

The corps also had to locate and review records of the former World War II Shell Beach Anti-Aircraft Training Center, located at mile marker 42 on the MR-GO, to determine what areas of Lake Borgne to avoid dredging for material for the wetlands projects.

Maps identified three areas used as firing ranges in the lake, forcing changes in the dredging locations.

The corps also had to develop rules for contractors to protect the threatened Gulf sturgeon, to comply with the Endangered Species Act.

When dredging begins, the contractor will have to drop the empty dredge bucket in the water and have spotters look for sturgeon before actually dredging soil from the lake.

Contractors also must be on the lookout for manatees, another protected species known to be in the lake at times during the year.

In determining where to put rock or build wetlands, designers also had to avoid several of a dozen potentially historic locations along the lakefront. The sites included shell middens and locations of human bones believed to be from American Indian tribes either before the arrival of French explorers in the early 1700s or during the first 50 to 100 years after the area was settled by Europeans.

In deciding which wetlands and armoring tasks to include in the project, planners were governed by the amount of money authorized by Congress, Klein said.

When complete, the projects will have built 9.3 miles of shoreline protection and 5.2 square miles of wetlands, with about half the wetlands created in open water and half existing wetlands "nourished" with dredged sediment to keep them above water.

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Categories:

Comments

gatormama1 says...

this is GREAT news!!! where are all of the comments? if i weren't recovering from "flu shot" generated mild flu, i'd be jumping up and down. way to go, USACE!!

Posted on 10/23/08 at 10:29PM

nolachris88 says...

thank heavens. some of the best news nola's heard in awhile. best thing corps has done in awhile.

Posted on 10/23/08 at 10:37PM

Shabba says...

Good news, obviously. But the real game begins and ends with Congress. Let's watch what happens there with these plans.

Posted on 10/23/08 at 10:45PM

UptownRay says...

GREAT, GREAT news! Now let's hope the Corps doesn't drag its feet.

Posted on 10/23/08 at 10:52PM

johnbgood says...

It is a good start, but it is only a start. The actual area for the wetland restoration, technically is part of the project for the surge barrier that seems to be broken out to give an appearance of a coastal restoration project. I will jump up and down when I see a large scale diversion cut in the Mississippi River levee and water and sediment are free flowing into the marsh.

Posted on 10/23/08 at 10:55PM

GentillyGirl says...

I'm happy with this news, but I'm waiting to see what the Corps of Engineers can actually accomplish.

They are batting 0.00 so far. (And yes, I am an ex nuclear engineer from the Military)

Posted on 10/23/08 at 10:55PM

BASILMOREAU says...

As a property owner in Ft Beauregard, I am ecstatic at hearing this news. We were going to build prior to Katrina but have been on hold. Now we may proceed...

Posted on 10/23/08 at 11:05PM

Roberteaux says...

Oh, this is indeed good news!

However, I'm also curious to see just how much the CoE can pull off here...

Got my fingers crossed!

Posted on 10/24/08 at 12:00AM

milwriter says...

Yes, some good news on the rebuilding front, but it "represent only a small part of expected efforts to reverse the erosion caused by the 40-year-old shipping shortcut to the Industrial Canal."

Much work needs to be done to restore the coastal wetlands & rebuild the region's hurricane infrastructure....keep the pressure on Congress to appropriate the required money.

Posted on 10/24/08 at 4:57AM

uptownnative says...

I have mixed feelings about this. I want to see wetlands restored not only for hurricane protection but for the wildlife. I just don't want to see a key asset that we can use in New Orleans go to waste (MR-GO). I can see in time where the two can coexist. But we need to do something on both ends. Losing jobs for wetland protection. I know it's a Guns vs Butter situation so I don't know where to side.

Posted on 10/24/08 at 6:08AM

dninc says...

Did i read this right?

Corps actually acknowledging the Marshland is a vital part of protecting South Louisiana??

This can't be right, something is mistyped or something, there's no way the Corps are now listening to Louisianians when they've said for 30 years that the erosion of the Marshland will be the death of South Louisiana and knock the wind out of the Oil producing and shipping in many parts of South Louisiana..

WOW.. just wow.. Almost too little too late, but at least they've caught themselves in time to restore 20 years worth of damage..

66.5 Million? Thats a small cry from the 30-40 Billion thats gonna be needed to get things done quickly and help restore land and faith in Louisiana again..

I still do not understand why the hell we can't use the Dredges that Dubai Uses to build Huge Islands off it's coast to speed up this process of rebuilding the coast, the damn Dredges are built in LaPlace, La and shipped all the way to Dubai but the US is restricting US States from using them???

Something is strange with that picture..

USE THE DAMN DREDGES!! Replenish the coast, hell build New Islands off the Coast of Louisiana and make them into parks and Resorts! The Technology is here and it's built right in Louisiana for Christ sake!

Posted on 10/24/08 at 7:04AM

Coot says...

Seeing is believing.

Posted on 10/24/08 at 7:29AM

miketabony says...

Mike Tidwell, author of "Bayou Farewell", said it best at a news conference after Katrina. Paraphrased, "If you're not going to rebuild the marshes, don't spend a dime on New Orleans, and if you're not going to address the problem of global warming and sea level rise, don't spend a dime on the marshes." As usual the powers that be have spent billions rebuilding New Orleans and its levees, and are now going to spend millions (billions?) trying to rebuild the marshes, while nothing is being done to address global warming and sea level rise. In fact, Louisiana still sells all the fossil fuels it can mine without even adding a carbon tax which might help pay for future disaster relief.

Finally, if you are going to try to address marshland repair at any level be useful a lot more than described in this article must be done. I wrote a paper in 2005, recommending a dam, with locks, across the Mississippi River around Alliance combined with two massive river diversion structures, one below Violet at Caernarvon, to rebuild the East Bank marshes, and the other at Jesuit Bend, to add sediment and fresh water to the Barataria Bay area. Using this plan the full resource of the Mississippi River can be used to build marsh while the shipping industry is accomodated, though it will be inconvenienced somewhat. Oherwise, start thinking about levees around Lucher and Reserve, not New Orleans. I don't think there is a realistic third choice and I restate the obvious, without a massive effort to reduce

atmospheric carbonization, all efforts at saving south Louisiana from sea level rise are doomed to failure.

Posted on 10/24/08 at 7:33AM

fedupinno1 says...

I won't get happy until it's done.

Posted on 10/24/08 at 7:43AM

fedupinno1 says...

Why wait 18 months to start? So another unprotected hurricane season....

Posted on 10/24/08 at 7:45AM

bayobudddy says...

This is fabulous news. Unfortunately, while the COE is rebuilding what it destroyed, through the surge from deep draft vessels maintaining steerage, the St. Bernard Council might very well pull a bigger blunder and actually permit a garbage site on the banks of Bayou Bienvenu. Let's hope there is enough common sense and INDEPENDENCE

Posted on 10/24/08 at 8:25AM

bayobudddy says...

This is a great start, at least they are trying. Unfortunately, while the COE is moving forward, the St. Bernard Council might take two steps back. There is a proposal to build a garbage waste site on the banks of Bayou Bienvenu, which could very well handle barged garbage in the future. Let's hope there is enough common sense and independence in the council to reject SDT's proposal, with prejudice.

Posted on 10/24/08 at 8:29AM

Freepress11 says...

That should reduce the surge by 5 or 6 inches.

And the Nutria rejoiced!

Take the 66 million and build some pump stations.

Posted on 10/24/08 at 8:55AM

possum says...

fedupinno1:

My thoughts, exactly. If they have already budgeted this money, then they should begin repairing the wetlands ASAP, right? This is very exciting news and I hope it pans out.

Posted on 10/24/08 at 9:10AM

bateaubob says...

Great news; but why wait a year and a half to start? By the way, has anybody ever seen a Gulf Sturgeon in the lake?

Posted on 10/24/08 at 9:24AM

champ01 says...

Seems like a small isolated fix to the wetlands.

Posted on 10/24/08 at 9:39AM

34zip says...

Before they do that, tear down the Iberville Project so that there will be more worth saving in new Orleans first!

Posted on 10/24/08 at 9:55AM

boathead says...

champ01, if you think that, you should get on GoogleEarth or look out the window if you ever fly over this spot. It looks like a cancer, spreading into the city.

This is great news. One step in the right direction. These borrow pits might also make some pretty sweet fishing holes in a few years. Would be great if some of those artificial reefs were placed in the borrow pits when the work is finished. I wonder how deep they will be allowed to go in these pits?

Posted on 10/24/08 at 10:44AM

MS1BackAgain says...

How many millions and how much time were wasted on the studies before they came up with this solution? Looks like they flipped a coin, or maybe played some rock/paper/scissors to decide where they would restore marsh, or put some rocks. What's wrong with restoring the marsh on the St. Bernard side of Bievenue, or putting some rocks on the Orleans side? Maybe they put a aerial photo on the wall, and threw some darts.

What a joke.

Posted on 10/24/08 at 11:38AM

shaw8607 says...

this may be too little too late. at least it looks like they are trying to make a concious effort. the damage from the MRGO has been done. its going to take alot more than that to fix it. the levees along the 40 arpent canal and MRGO need to be raised and reinforced first. rebuilding the wet lands is a long process and we in st. bernard need something done now. shell beach got 9ft of water during gustav. whos to say that the outer protection levees between st. bernard and lake bourgne are going to hold anything back next

time. they need to raise the flood walls in the industrial canal asap. we all watched them almost be over topped.

Posted on 10/24/08 at 12:02PM

pckerfan says...

This is great news for the city and I agree; why wait 18mths to get started? I would think they would want to start sooner to close the MRGO. The sooner they start, the sooner the city will be protected from storm surge. At least they are trying, but I'll believe it when I see it and hear it (I listen to WWL on-line) the work as actually started.

Posted on 10/24/08 at 6:03PM

hueyguy says...

18 months is an expedited schedule for the Corps. We will be lucky to see it get built that fast.

This project will take design and undergo a bidding process like all there other jobs.

The MRGO is some of the softest soils in town and building rock dikes out there is a big challenge. The rock continues to sink and lots of rock will be needed.

Posted on 10/25/08 at 11:20AM

MicahD says...

I am glad to see a plan, but as an educated person, I have a problem with the plan listed.

These "borrow sites" will cause areas of the lake to be deeper before the shore. Therefore, wave height in a storm would be increased in the deeper areas. These larger waves will pound against the newly constructed shoreline with greater force.

We don't have any mud to donate here. If we take it from one place and put it in another, we will potentially suffer the blowback from the deeper areas created. This is another reason that I don't like the corps. They don't think deeply enough. They act and waste nationwide taxpayers' money, and when they fail they are accountable to no one.

Our state should open up trade with other states in the union. We have resources that we could send them in exchange for trains, barges, etc., of mud and rock. If the federal government has a problem with it, then we need to slap them in the face with the 10th Amendment.

Posted on 10/26/08 at 1:18AM

Footer