

Inside Report for June 24, 2008

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When the Legislature passed a law in 2005 directing the state to integrate and develop a master plan for coastal restoration and hurricane protection, the law kept separate some duties between certain state departments.

With the passage of a new revision to that law this legislative session, that's all changed.

Now instead of the state Department of Natural Resources being in charge of restoration work and the state Department of Transportation and Development being in charge of hurricane protection, staff from the two are being combined.

Starting July 1, staff in these two departments — to eventually number about 130 people — will work together under the umbrella of the state's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority and the Governor's Office of Coastal Activities.

This year, the merger will be "in spirit only" but the plan is to have the staff of this effort housed in one location by the start of the 2009 hurricane season, said Garret Graves, director of the Governor's Office of Coastal Activities.

"The key thing for us is we don't have any downtime as a result of the integration," Graves said.

The change will help staff that used to handle \$240 million to \$250 million in work a year to more efficiently join forces to deal with the \$4 billion to \$5 billion in work that will be done during the next several years, Graves said.

People from each department will be combined into teams such as engineering teams, planning teams and combined into a group called the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority Implementation Team.

So what they're doing is basically aligning the engineering, planning, contracting and putting them on the same teams instead of having them in the "silos" of different departments, Graves said.

The two departments have a combined 130-140 people working on these issues, he said. Eventually, it's likely the group will pull in some additional people from departments such as Department of Environmental Quality or the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Graves said. It's likely that would only be about 10 or 20 additional people, Graves said.

“We’re not anticipating significant increases (in staff),” Graves said.

Dave Frugé, the incoming director of planning and program management for the CPRA Integration Team, said there are several groups like project support, science and engineering, planning, and more.

The integrated approach will be more efficient, he said.

Graves said the restoration authority implementation team will be under the Governor’s Office of Coastal Activities and an executive committee made up of the secretaries from DOTD, DNR and the coastal activities office.

The director of implementation will report to Graves initially, but Graves said the CPRA plans to hire an executive director for the program. “We didn’t want to do anything where we create this whole new entity,” Graves said.

Instead, it was decided to integrate staff from the two organizations, which can then reach back to the departments for services such as human resources, accounting, legal counsel and contracting.

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