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## More restoration funds allocated

Federal agreement frees \$300 million for mix of coastal projects

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- Published: Aug 14, 2008 - Page: 1A - UPDATED: 12:45 a.m.

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NEW ORLEANS — Gov. Bobby Jindal called Wednesday a “billion-dollar day” for Louisiana after the state’s coastal and levee authority approved an additional \$300 million in projects.

“It’s a great day for our state and a great day for coastal restoration,” Gov. Bobby Jindal said after a meeting of the state’s Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority in New Orleans.

This most recent group of projects — which includes the \$300 million set aside by the Legislature for restoration and levee work — bumps the state’s coastal restoration and levee work past the \$1 billion mark over the next several years.

The balance of the \$1.1 billion comes from programs such as the Coastal Impact Assistance Program, the state-federal Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act, the state trust fund and surplus state funds from 2007.

“This will be the most money the state has spent in one year on restoration,” Jindal said.

To put the amount in perspective, the governor said that before Hurricane Katrina, the state spent between \$10 million and \$15 million a year on coastal restoration.

The most recent list of projects approved by the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority includes not only money to help with the state’s share for New Orleans-area levees, but also puts another \$40 million toward the levee system being built in Terrebonne Parish and \$15 million to improve the levee system in Lafourche.

Coastal restoration projects include funding for freshwater diversion projects in Bayou Lafourche and Myrtle Grove, as well as shoreline protection projects in south Louisiana.

The money was freed up after last week’s executive order by President Bush allowing Louisiana more time to pay its share of New Orleans area levee improvements, said Garret Graves, chairman of the authority and the governor’s executive assistant for coastal activities.

Until that agreement, the state was expected to pay its share — about \$1.8 billion — by 2011, the time the projects are expected to be completed.

However, the executive order allows the state to repay that amount over the next 30 years instead, Graves said.

“We were in fact given a mortgage, a low-interest mortgage,” Graves said. “It frees up the state.”

The most recent list of projects still includes \$100 million that will allow the state to move forward with land acquisition needed for the levee improvements in the greater New Orleans area, Graves said.

The complete list of projects the authority approved Wednesday will now need to go to the Legislature’s joint budget committee for approval before the money can be released for construction, Graves said.

The recommended \$300 million in projects includes \$160.5 million for hurricane protection, \$110 million for coastal restoration, \$16 million for coast-wide initiatives and \$13.5 million as an emergency reserve.

The coast-wide initiatives, among other things, will provide state incentives for companies to develop new dredging technology.

David Miller, CPRA director of implementation, explained that the dredging equipment and technology currently used in the state for coastal restoration comes from the navigation dredging industry. The state would like to see new dredging technologies developed that would operate more efficiently for coastal restoration projects, such as placing dredged river sediments into marsh areas to build land.

In addition, Graves said, the state wants to increase the number of areas in the state that are prepared to accept dirt dredged by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to build marsh.

Several environmental groups applauded the recent announcement during the meeting.

Carlton Dufrechou, executive director of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, said Wednesday’s list of projects, along with the millions of dollars the state has already pledged, sends a strong message to the country. Louisiana is willing to put up its own money for restoration and protection and not just rely on federal funding, Dufrechou said.

Steven Peyronnin, with the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, said his group supports the adoption of all the recommended projects.

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