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Commentary

The Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana



Earth Day – Article 3 Sustaining Coastal Progress

Local governments play a critical role in flood protection and coastal restoration. They share a responsibility with the state to protect citizens, property and livelihoods. While the federal and state governments have made significant investments in hurricane protection infrastructure, the bulk of the burden of operating and maintaining the local infrastructure falls to the local levee districts and coastal parishes. As the locals spend money on coastal projects, it is imperative that they have a plan to pay for maintenance and upkeep.

Partly by necessity, these levee districts and coastal parishes have historically piecemealed various sources of revenue to build, operate and maintain their hurricane and flood protection assets, including local taxes and fees, levee district collections, and federal and state support. Some local governing authorities have had success in raising local millages or taxes to operate and maintain flood protection infrastructure, while others have not.

After Hurricane Katrina, the federal government invested billions in rebuilding and improving the hurricane protection system in south Louisiana. This was a critical investment to protect our citizens and property. However, just like the cost of owning a car is more than just the sticker price, it is important to recognize the increased financial demands on levee districts and coastal parishes to meet the additional operating and maintenance requirements for this new level of protection.

And now, coastal parishes are receiving or are in line to receive new sources of money from the Deepwater Horizon settlement, federal revenue sharing from offshore drilling, and state matching funds.

The largest share of the new revenue is in settlements from the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Specifically, the congressional RESTORE Act dedicated civil penalties from the incident to provide for a regional approach to the restoration of the impacted ecosystem and economy.

Coastal Parishes Receiving Funds	
Ascension	St. Bernard
Assumption	St. Charles
Calcasieu	St. James
Cameron	St. John the Baptist
Iberia	St. Martin
Jefferson	St. Mary
Lafourche	St. Tammany
Livingston	Terrebonne
Orleans	Tangipahoa
Plaquemines	Vermillion

The coastal parishes have submitted multiyear implementation plans to receive funding to support a significant investment of dollars for new flood protection and restoration of their region.

The state has also submitted its implementation plan, the RESTORE Plan, which includes significant proposals, such as a project that will prevent damaging salt water from intruding into Terrebonne wetlands. This \$350 million project when completed by the state will be turned over to the local sponsor, who will be responsible for all operations and maintenance.

These investments are critical elements in shoring up our coastal protection and restoration infrastructure to protect our citizens, property and livelihoods. Levee districts and coastal parishes must be prepared for the increased financial obligation of operating and maintaining these assets. Without a plan to sustain the projects that are completed, any progress could literally wash away.

Recommendation

The Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority should require that local governing authorities develop plans to provide for operation and maintenance of these assets built with RESTORE funds.

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