

Update on the False River Ecosystem Restoration Project

June 18, 2013

This is a status report of the on-going progress on tasks undertaken prior to and since the August 1, 2012 Public Meeting of the False River Watershed Council (the "Council").

1. **Task:** Develop Sediment Trap and Channel Maintenance Plan

Status: The revised draft plan developed by Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (LDNR) has been submitted to the Pointe Coupee Police Jury for consideration.

2. **Task:** Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) grant application for channel landowners to reduce erosion

Status: NRCS has received four applications for EQIP for livestock producers within the Island portion of the False River watershed. These applications are for fences, waterlines, water troughs, and heavy use area protection. NRCS' cutoff date for the first funding pool was Dec 1, so they will not have any additional applications in the first funding pool. NRCS obligated contracts in February, based on funding availability. NRCS was able to obligate three livestock applications in the False River Watershed. All available funds for 2013 were allocated. Based on communication with NRCS, it is unlikely that additional funds will be received this year. NRCS has two more livestock applications within the watershed. It is anticipated that they will be included in next year's funding.

3. **Task:** Develop Water Quality Monitoring Program

Status: Plan is under development - coordinating work being performed by Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) and Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ) and identifying data needs. A draft Scope of Services has been prepared by LSU School of Renewable Resources that was reviewed. Funding sources must be identified for additional work in scope of services beyond what is being performed routinely by LDWF and periodically by LDEQ.

4. **Task:** Perform Watershed Drainage Network Assessment

Status: Work proceeding. Representatives from Fenstermaker and Associates (Fenstermaker) placed the data sondes in the field and Chutz Surveying surveyed the channels profile and the data sonde housings. All the data has been downloaded and processed. Local residents have assisted Fenstermaker by collecting time sensitive water samples. Fenstermaker issued a draft report to LDNR. It is anticipated that the report will be available in June 2013. When approved, the report will be posted on the website. Additional funding is needed to perform the assessment of the remainder of the watershed. It is anticipated that funding from a Beneficial Environmental Project that is being pursued will be utilized for the evaluation of the remaining drainage networks, as well as construction and maintenance of proposed hydromodifications.

5. **Task:** Obtain and review Pointe Coupee Parish Drainage Master Plan

Status: Plan has been provided by the Parish's consultant to LDNR. LDNR is evaluating impacts to the False River Watershed and will discuss any suggestions with Parish officials.

6. **Task:** Apply Tree Grant for Habitat Improvement

Status: LDNR met with the Baton Rouge Green Foundation (BRGF) to find out whether it could provide trees for the project. BRGF relies on donations to fund their efforts and concentrates its efforts in EBR Parish. They did offer to potentially conduct a reduced-price trees sale as a source of tree, and/or to potentially work with a Pointe Coupee area donor (if donors can be identified) as a way to promote tree planting. In 2012, LDNR submitted on behalf of the PCPJ a request to the Apache Corp. program. The request was not funded by the Apache Corp. program that year. A new grant application will be prepared and submitted to Apache Corp between June 4 and July 26, 2013. Additional partners for habitat improvement are in the process of being identified.

7. **Task:** Submit Beneficial Environmental Project Nomination to LDEQ for funding of sediment trap maintenance

Status: Completed and submitted by Parish Officials to LDEQ on 6/12/12. LDNR and the Council are working with a large industry to obtain from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency final approval for a project to fund further drainage studies and hydromodification.

8. **Task:** Make request to LDEQ for 319 (Non-Point Source) funding for False River Watershed

Status: Meeting held with LDEQ to discuss project. Chances for funding do not appear good due to lack of recognized water quality impairment in False River. LDNR will continue to monitor other potential non-point source funding sources. An application for Barataria Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP) funding was submitted on 8/21/12 by the parish for consideration in the upcoming fiscal year budget cycle. The application is currently under review by BTNEP.

9. **Task:** Determine permitting requirements for work performed during drawdown (e.g. individuals want to perform dredge work other than what is paid for with public funds)

Status: Under development – LDNR has discussed with State Lands, LDWF, and the Corps of Engineers the permits will be required for this type of work. Permit application forms and information on completion will be placed on the web site.

10. **Task:** Develop Best Management Practices (BMP's) for False River Watershed - Work with LDEQ for BMP's related to home construction and other items that may cause runoff issues and provide to Police Jury for consideration to use as part of building permit process or to otherwise make available.

Status: LDNR/LDWF/LDEQ working to develop BMPs to provide to Parish for consideration. A revised erosion and sediment ordinance has been submitted to the Pointe Coupee Police Jurors for their consideration. Revisions are being made to address landowners and farmers concerns.

11. Task: Obtain Grant to Expand Sewer System and improve Individual Wastewater Treatment Systems

Status: Parish has grant application in with LDEQ for \$100,000 for evaluation of the expansion of the sewer system on the Island; implementation projected at \$5-6 million (currently not funded). LDNR is working with Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (LDHH) to make information on the web site available regarding when new sewer systems are required and best management practices for existing individual waste water treatment systems. Information obtained to date has been placed on the web site.

12. Task: Develop Plan for Habitat Improvement

Status: LDWF is finalizing a draft brochure for camp/homeowners. As soon as the brochure is finalized it will be posted on the website. LDWF is starting with planning and some preparation. Preliminary soundings of the flats to identify spawning bed locations by LDWF have been completed. Funding is being sought for the creation of gravel spawning beds, reef structures and other habitats.

13. Task: Perform standardized sampling of fish population in False River to continue fishery evaluation and assist with management decisions

Status: Ongoing effort by LDWF. LDWF completed in April the last sampling round of a 3-year age & growth sampling program for largemouth bass. Analysis and result should be available later this year. LDWF has completed their fall electrofishing survey to estimate fish population. LDWF ran gill nets in January and talked to some commercial fishermen, who indicated that they were having great success with the commercial season. Based upon communication by LDNR with commercial fishermen/fish markets, an estimated 28,000 lbs. of rough fish was caught during the commercial season.

14. Task: Extend No Wake Zone in North and South Flats

Status: Surveying has been completed and information provided to Parish to review and determine proper placement. The Council approved the modified 6-foot change at its September 2012 meeting. A public hearing on the amendment to Sub-section (a) of Section 15-6 of Chapter 15 of the Code of Ordinances re-defining the width of such zones and establish a six (6) feet buoy protection on the North & South Flats of False River was held and the amendment passed by the Pointe Coupee Police Jury on September 25, 2012. The amendment became effective in October 2012; Chustz surveying provided the GIS locations of the buoys to the Kiwanis Club for relocation. The Kiwanis Club is moving forward and making progress on moving the buoys with ½ of the north flats completed. They will complete the north flats then move onto the south flats.

15. **Task:** Set up fund for individuals and corporations to contribute to False River Ecosystem Restoration effort.

Status: The False River Restoration Fund was established with the help of The Baton Rouge Area Foundation as a repository for monetary donations. The Fund may be used to pay for services and materials to further the restoration of the watershed and habitat of False River, and to provide matching contributions that are required for state and/or federal funds provided. Fund raising activities are planned for Summer/Fall 2013.

16. **Task:** Further develop False River Ecosystem Restoration Website

Status: LDEQ water quality data from 2001 and 2011/2012 studies have been posted to website along with a large map of False River Watershed. Frequently Asked Questions have been developed from emails submitted to False River email address and phone calls, and have been posted to the False River web site. Newspaper articles and other pertinent information have also been posted on the web site.

17. **Task:** Develop Public Outreach Plan

Status: In development, documents and presentations have been placed on web site along with news articles and frequently asked questions. Plans are to update website with list of actions completed and in progress. Press Releases will be issued as actions are taken. Other means of communication under consideration are email blasts, flyers, etc. A press release was issued on March 19, 2013 describing the ongoing effort of the Council. The press release has been posted on the web site. In April 2013, a short documentary was prepared by a local television station and 200 copies were made for distribution and the documentary has been aired on a Baton Rouge station.

18. **Task:** Monitor Progress of Mitigation Bank Development in False River Watershed

Status: Two companies have indicated plans to establish mitigation banks in the watershed and are currently in discussions with the Corps of Engineers, but the banks projects have not been approved to date. The 234 acres Ponderosa Ranch project's draft mitigation bank instrument (MBI) is currently being review by the Corps of Engineers and should go forward shortly. The 254.8 acres Grand Swamp project has just submitted a revised draft prospectus and will be shortly on public notice. The mitigation banks will develop additional habitat and may result in reduced sediment influx into the lake.

19. **Task:** Obtain information from Corps of Engineers on plan that was being developed

Status: Interim Draft Feasibility Study has been obtained and posted to the web site, and the document has been reviewed.

20. Task: Obtain funding through Capital Outlay for Ecosystem Restoration

Status: House Bill 2 was approved by the Legislature in the 2012 Regular Session and included \$500,000 in Priority 2 funding and \$2.2 million in Priority 5 funding for the False River Ecosystem Restoration project. The Bond Commission granted a line of credit at their November 15, 2012 meeting for the priority 2 funds. Parish Officials are currently working with the Division of Administration to provide them with necessary information. The Cooperative Endeavor Agreement has been signed between the State and Parish officials and PCPJ has selected an engineering firm to ensure rapid implementation. During the 2013 Legislative Session, \$1,000,000 of the priority 5 funds has been moved to priority 1 in House Bill 2 and was approved by the legislature. The Bond Commission approval is required prior to the funds becoming available. The Bond Commission will likely meet in the fall of 2013 to consider funding.