

Dear Mr. St. Pe' :

Thank you for your presentation during the Mississippi River Commission public meeting held in Houma, Louisiana, on August 23, 2002. In your statement you emphasized the importance of protecting the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary, one of only eight such national estuaries. You also expressed support for the ongoing coastal restoration efforts throughout south Louisiana and indicated that the Mississippi River is the only viable tool to restore the south Louisiana ecosystem to its former state.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District, has implemented two notable projects, Caernarvon and Davis Pond Freshwater Diversions, using the Mississippi River as a resource. The current operational plan for the Caernarvon Freshwater Diversion structure has produced excellent results. Monitoring of the project since 1988 by the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, Coastal Restoration Division, has shown that the project has enhanced emergent marsh vegetation, reduced marsh loss, and significantly increased commercial and recreational fisheries and wildlife productivity. Monitoring data show that freshwater marsh plants increased over seven times, brackish marsh plants increased by almost 50 percent since operation of the structure began, and the amount of salt marsh vegetation has decreased by more than half. Caernarvon has helped to reduce marsh loss as well. Results show a net

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increase in marshland of about 5.9 percent per year. The Davis Pond Freshwater Diversion project was dedicated on March 26, 2002. Diversions began July 17, 2002, once all oyster leases were relocated or purchased. Positive results similar to those for the Caernarvon project are expected. The Commission realizes the importance of efforts like these and will continue to support these types of projects as directed by Congress.

The New Orleans District, in conjunction with the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources as the sponsor, is currently completing feasibility studies for two component projects of the Louisiana Coastal Area Comprehensive Plan. Draft feasibility reports for the Barataria Basin Wetland Creation and Restoration Study and the Barataria Basin Barrier Shoreline Restoration are

nearing completion, and the final reports will be finished on a schedule that will allow these projects to be considered for authorization in a potential 2004 Water Resources Development Act.

The Commission appreciates receiving your comments and looks forward to hearing from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Don T. Riley  
Brigadier General, U. S. Army  
President Designee, Mississippi  
River Commission