

U.S. Department of  
Homeland Security

United States  
Coast Guard



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16000  
December 3, 2007

Colonel Alvin B. Lee  
United States Corps of Engineers  
P. O. Box 60267  
New Orleans, LA 70160-0267

Dear Colonel Lee:

Ms. Angela Minton of your staff asked the Coast Guard to review and provide comments on Section 2.5.3.4 of the Corps of Engineers Integrated Final Report to Congress and Legislative Environmental Impact Statement for the Mississippi River – Gulf Outlet Deep-Draft De-authorization Study. Ms. Minton specifically requested our comments about potential vessel traffic on the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) if Alternative 3 were implemented. Alternative 3 of this report stops all Corps operations and maintenance dredging on the MRGO.

It is our belief that local mariners will continue to transit the upper portion of the MRGO. The Coast Guard will not automatically discontinue all the aids to navigation (AtoN) on the MRGO. The Coast Guard in this scenario would continue to maintain some AtoN on the MRGO as long as there is sufficient maritime traffic and the availability of sufficient water for the local mariners to transit the area safely exists.

Please contact me or Mr. Steve Hadley at the above number if you need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. J. Arenstam".

J. J. ARENSTAM  
Commander, U.S. Coast Guard  
Waterways Management Branch  
Eighth Coast Guard District  
By Direction



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240



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Mr. Raleigh H. Leef  
Acting Chief, Policy and Policy Compliance Division  
Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
CECW-P (SA)  
7701 Telegraph Road  
Alexandria, VA 22315-3860

Dear Mr. Leef:

The U.S. Department of the Interior has reviewed the Chief of Engineers' Proposed Report on the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) Deep Draft De-authorization Study, St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana. The following comments were developed by our U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and are offered in accordance with provisions of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (48 Stat. 401, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 661 et seq.), and the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (87 Stat. 884, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.).

The FWS's Lafayette, Louisiana, Field Office reviewed the proposed report of the Chief of Engineers and the November 2007 Final Report and Legislative Environmental Impact Statement (LEIS). As directed by the Congress in Public Law 109-234, the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Hurricane Recovery 2006, the Corps shall utilize \$3,300,000 to develop a comprehensive plan, at full Federal expense, to de-authorize deep-draft navigation on the MRGO, Louisiana, extending from the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway. The Tentatively Selected Plan (TSP) consists of totally closing the MRGO with a rock structure at the south ridge of Bayou La Loutre in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana. The structure would connect the two sides of the ridge, a distance of about 950 feet, and would be at +5 feet Mean Low Gulf elevation.

We recommended that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) perform monitoring as specified in our 2(b) Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act Report to determine the actual environmental benefits derived from the proposed de-authorization, temporary maintenance of existing shoreline protection in critical locations along the MRGO and continued authority to dredge a portion of the MRGO to provide material to nourish Breton Island, which is part of the Breton National Wildlife Refuge (BNWR), a coastal barrier island adjacent to the channel. Monitoring would provide baseline information for similar projects on the coast and any future Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration (LaCPR) or other restoration projects in the area. Temporary maintenance is proposed to ensure that banklines providing critical erosion protection are not breached allowing synergistic erosive forces to result in accelerated wetland losses. Failure to conduct maintenance may further the loss of wetlands resulting in the additional loss of storm surge reduction capabilities in those areas southeast of New

Orleans. Nourishment via disposal of material dredged from the MRGO and placed in the near-shore waters of Breton Island would allow that refuge to continue to provide habitat for the threatened piping plover and the endangered eastern brown pelican.

The Corps does not intend to initiate monitoring because other coast-wide monitoring programs are operating in the project area and the plan did not include maintenance of existing critical shoreline protection and nourishment of the BNWR because ecosystem restoration is being addressed as part of the ongoing comprehensive LaCPR study. Authority to develop the de-authorization plan required that the plan be fully consistent with and integrated into the LaCPR Plan; currently the Corps has adopted an adaptive management approach to LaCPR which includes monitoring, and they have expressed support for restoration to enhance and improve storm reduction and hurricane protection. Because of the complexity and scope of the LaCPR study and the need for authorization which may delay implementation of the recommendations, we further recommend that an additional study team within the LaCPR study (or other appropriate coastal restoration program such as the Louisiana Coastal Area [LCA] Study or Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act [CWPPRA]) be organized by the Corps to address the FWS recommendations by: 1) gathering and interpreting relevant water quality data from existing coast-wide monitoring programs to assess the actual benefits of channel closure; and 2) developing and implementing a monitoring program to determine the need to implement the recommended maintenance actions, and if monitoring warrants develop a restoration proposal, request authorization, and implement such actions.

We fully support the measures proposed for the MRGO Deep Draft De-Authorization project and appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the draft LEIS. If you have any questions regarding our comments, please contact Catherine Breaux, FWS, Lafayette, Louisiana Field Office at (504) 862-2689.

Sincerely,



Willie R. Taylor  
Director, Office of Environmental Policy  
and Compliance



Coastal Protection and  
Restoration Authority of Louisiana

December 13, 2007

Policy and Policy Compliance Division  
Headquarters  
U. S. Army Corps of Engineers  
CECW-P (SA)  
7701 Telegraph Road  
Alexandria, VA 22315-3860

Dear Sirs:

This letter is in response to your November 15, 2007 request for the views of the State of Louisiana on the proposed report of the Chief of Engineers and the report of the district engineer, including the legislative environmental impact statement (LEIS), on the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Deep Draft De-authorization Study.

The State of Louisiana concurs with the report recommendation. We are anxious to have the MRGO closed as soon as possible and have expressed this intention previously in letters from the Governor and other state officials.

Closing the MRGO at Bayou LaLoutre is recommended in the State Master Plan. In addition, the State Annual Plan includes funds for accomplishing our cost sharing responsibilities related to the closure structure.

We are also cognizant of the requirements of the WRDA of 2007 which direct coastal restoration measures to rectify the immense wetlands damage caused by the MRGO and authorize funding for relocation assistance for affected deep draft facilities. The Corps should actively pursue the closure structure, coastal restoration measures, and relocation assistance.

Request your office expedite implementation of these urgently needed actions.

Sincerely,

Sidney Coffee, Chair  
Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana

## Bee, Patricia L HQ02

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**From:** Jansky.Michael@epamail.epa.gov  
**Sent:** Wednesday, December 19, 2007 12:12 PM  
**To:** Bee, Patricia L HQ02  
**Subject:** Re: Mississippi River Gulf Outlet

Region 6 rated the DEIS as LO (lack of objection). We had no further comments to offer on the FEIS. Thanks.