

RESTORE the CENTRAL WETLANDS

In the early 1950s, the Central Wetlands was primarily a freshwater system dominated by cypress swamp (approx. 25% of the land area) and freshwater marsh (approx. 29% of the land area). In large part, because of saltwater conveyed by the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) shipping channel, the Central Wetlands is now a broken mix of open water, intermediate and brackish marsh, and patches of swamp (less than 20% of the 1950s swamp remains).ⁱ Today, with the closure of the MRGO to navigation, there are ongoing efforts to achieve the vision of a restored Central Wetlands.

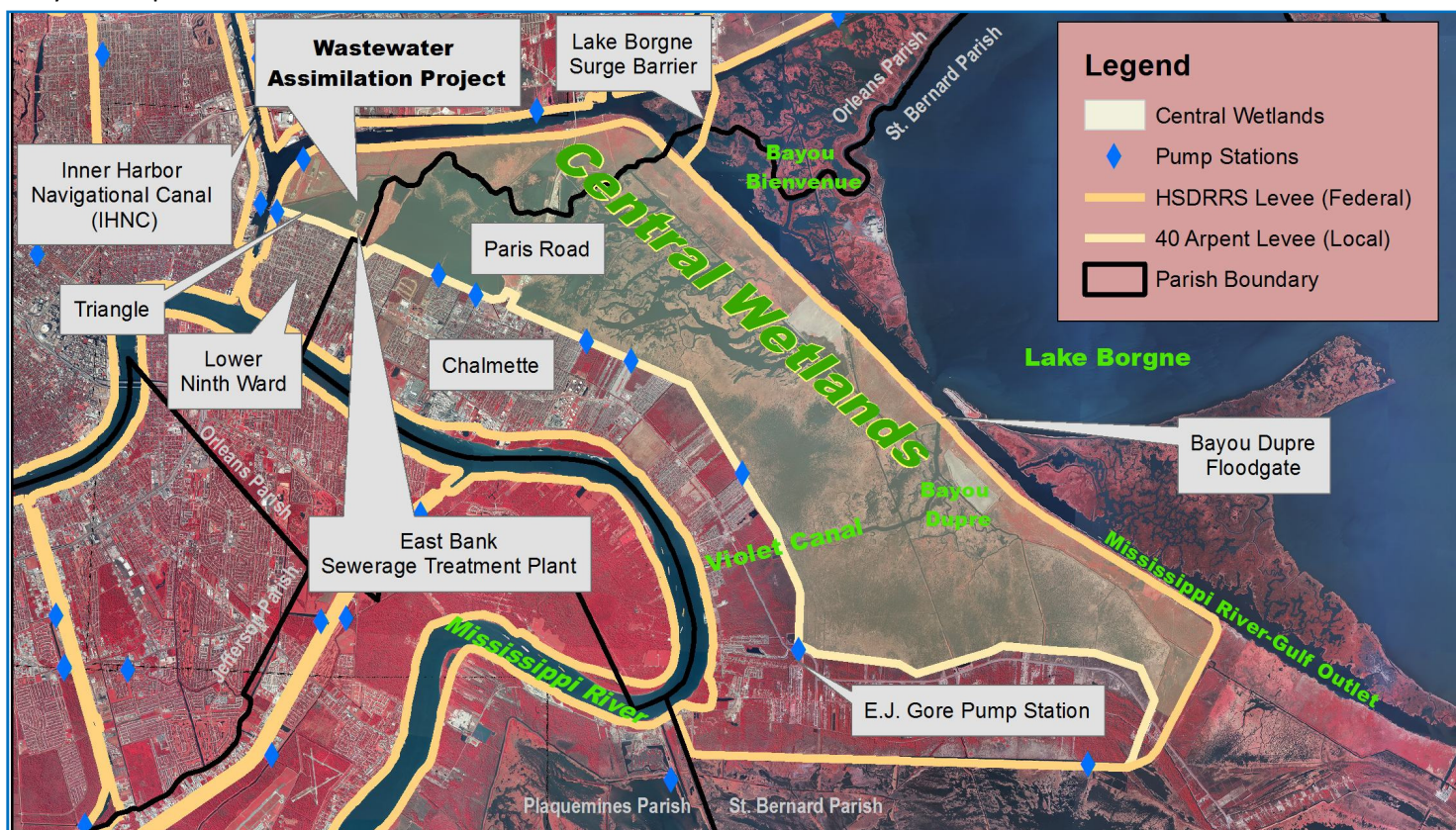
RESTORATION BENEFITS

Primary benefits of a restored Central Wetlands:

- Mitigate historical impacts of the MRGO channel;
- Improve fish and wildlife habitat;
- Increase the resiliency of coastal wetlands to erosion, subsidence, and sea level rise; and
- Create jobs in restoration and ecotourism.

Restoration of this 30,000 acre area would have several benefits for the residents of the New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish. Because of its proximity to downtown New Orleans, both the restoration process and a restored Central Wetlands could create jobs for local residents and opportunities for urban communities to connect to the coast.ⁱⁱ Restoration of the entire Central Wetlands Unit could provide modest storm protection if flooding occurs within the MRGO levee.

Furthermore, the Central Wetlands could serve as an easily-accessible demonstration of what restoration can accomplish, engaging both citizens and decision-makers from around the country in the future of coastal Louisiana. To accomplish this restoration, land rights will need to be addressed in order to assure access for habitat management and any future public use.



Central Wetlands

RESTORATION NEEDS

Primary restoration needs:

- Restore Bayou Bienvenue;
- Fill critical open water areas with dredged sediments (sourced from the Mississippi River);
- Supply freshwater and nutrients through the Violet Diversion and a well-engineered and monitored wastewater assimilation system;
- Plant cypress and other native wetland vegetation; and
- Control nutria to protect newly-planted bald cypress seedlings and other wetland vegetation from herbivory until the ecosystem can be reestablished.

To achieve large-scale, sustainable restoration of the Central Wetlands, a comprehensive vision for the area is needed. This includes coordination of planned and ongoing projects such as wastewater assimilation, the Violet Diversion, Bayou Bienvenue restoration, and cypress swamp and marsh restoration. A first step toward this comprehensive vision is a recently completed baseline inventory of Central Wetlands conditions, including hydrology, wetland health, and soil strength and salinity. Using this baseline inventory, we can detail plans for restoration including creation of a series of swamp ridges, small lakes, and fresh and intermediate marsh in the areas of the Central Wetlands and bottomland hardwood forest.

ONGOING RESTORATION EFFORTS

The **Army Corps MRGO Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study** is a congressionally mandated plan for restoration in the entire MRGO ecosystem, including the Central Wetlands. This plan is nearing completion (scheduled to be presented to Congress mid-2012) and includes full restoration of the Central Wetlands unit, including a river diversion in Violet and sediment fill for swamp and marsh restoration. Cost: \$3-4 billion

The Central Wetlands **CIAP Wastewater Assimilation Project** will provide fresh water and nutrients needed to reduce salinity and encourage plant growth—by redirecting and reusing treated wastewater and effluent from the East Bank Sewage Treatment Plant into the area—rather than discarding all of it into the Mississippi River. Restoring freshwater flows and taking maximum advantage of the resources available serves as a model for all coastal Louisiana restoration efforts. Currently, the project is on track to freshen approximately 2300 acres. Cost: \$10 million

There are two **CWPPRA proposals** being prepared to help restore cypress in both the City of New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish. The Orleans proposal centers on a cypress-tupelo nursery and the St. Bernard proposal centers on a slurry pipeline from the Mississippi River to the Central Wetlands near Violet. Orleans Cost: under \$2 million/St. Bernard Cost: TBD

YOUR SUPPORT IS NEEDED

Your help is needed to make sure these projects move forward, gain funding, and restore the Central Wetlands.

Visit www.MississippiRiverDelta.org and check out “Restoration Projects” for more information and to learn how you can get involved. Contact Amanda Moore, National Wildlife Federation, at 504-273-4838 or MooreA@nwf.org.



ⁱ Historical maps suggest that cypress swamp may have accounted for 40-50% of the habitat in the early part of the 20th century. However, quantitative habitat data are not available prior to 1950. For more information on habitat change in the Central Wetlands, please see: FitzGerald, D. S. Penland., A. Milanese, M. Minder, and K. Westphal. 2008. Impact of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MR-GO): Geology and Geomorphology. Expert Report, Denham Springs, LA. Available at:

<http://www.katrinadocs.com>

ⁱⁱ <http://blogs.edf.org/restorationandresilience/2010/05/03/profiles-in-restoration-the-central-wetlands-unit-part-vi/>