

RESTORE

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER DELTA

RECONNECTING THE RIVER WITH ITS DELTA TO PROTECT PEOPLE, WILDLIFE AND JOBS

mississippiriverdelta.org

Restore the Central Wetlands

In the early 1950s, the Central Wetlands was primarily a freshwater system dominated by cypress swamp and freshwater marsh. However, the ensuing decades saw much decay in the area's ecosystem, in large part because of salt water sent in by the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO). Today, the area is a broken mix of open water, intermediate and brackish marsh, and patches of swamp. Less than 25 percent of the beautiful cypress swamp remains. With the closure of the MRGO to navigation following hurricane Katrina, there are ongoing efforts to restore this important area.

RESTORATION BENEFITS

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

The Central Wetlands could also 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 ensure access for habitat management and any future public use.

ⁱ Historical maps suggest that cypress swamp may have accounted for 40-50 percent 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. Milanes, 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://katrinadocs.com>

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

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF A RESTORED CENTRAL WETLANDS

Mitigate

the historic impacts of the MRGO channel

Improve

fish and wildlife habitat

Increase

the resiliency of coastal wetlands to erosion, subsidence and sea level rise

Create

jobs in restoration and ecotourism



RESTORATION NEEDS

- Restore the Bayou Bienvenue Wetland Triangle
- Fill critical open water areas with dredged sediment sourced from the Mississippi River
- Supply freshwater nutrients through both the Violet Diversion and a well engineered and monitored wastewater assimilation system
- Plant cypress and other wetland vegetation
- Control nutria to protect newly planted bald cypress seedlings and other wetland vegetation.



To achieve sustainable, large-scale 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 Wetland Triangle 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, 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 nearby bottomland hardwood forest.

ONGOING RESTORATION EFFORTS

The **Louisiana 2012 Coastal Master Plan's** first implementation period (2012-2031) includes two restoration projects in the Central Wetlands. The Central Wetlands Diversion will provide sediment for emerging marsh creation and nutrients to sustain existing wetlands. The Central Wetlands Marsh Creation project will restore 2,010 acres of marsh near Bayou Bienvenue. **Project costs:** Diversion, \$189 million; marsh creation, \$234 million.

The **Army Corps of Engineers MRGO Ecosystem Restoration Plan Feasibility Study** is a congressionally mandated plan for restoration of the MRGO ecosystem, including the Central Wetlands. This plan includes full restoration of the 30,000-acre Central Wetlands Unit, including a river diversion in Violet and sediment fill for swamp and marsh restoration. **Project cost:** \$3-4 billion.

The **Central Wetlands Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP) Wastewater Assimilation Project** will provide the 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 rather than discarding 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. **Project cost:** \$10 million.

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. To learn how you can get involved, contact Amanda Moore, National Wildlife Federation, at 504-273-4838 or MooreA@nwf.org.

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WHO WE ARE The Mississippi River Delta Restoration Campaign is made up of campaign staff from Environmental Defense Fund, National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana and Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation working collaboratively to restore the Mississippi River Delta. We are located in Houma, New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Washington, D.C.; and around the United States.

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