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Morganza Action Coalition Launches Public Relations Campaign Supporting Levee System Authorization

A Terrebonne Parish-based advocacy group known as the Morganza Action Coalition (MAC) has launched a nation-wide public relations campaign aimed at garnering Congressional support for authorization of the Morganza-to-the-Gulf Hurricane Protection System. A 22-member Congressional Conference Committee is slated to finalize the 2006 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) containing authorization for the Morganza project before Congress recesses in October.

“For over seven years, Terrebonne Parish has pleaded for federal action to authorize construction of the Morganza levee system, basically to give the U.S. Corps of Engineers permission to move forward with the project,” says MAC President Daniel Walker of Houma. “This is the closest we have ever come to winning authorization, and this Coalition is determined to keep the Morganza project in the minds of the conferees and ensure that the project remains intact when WRDA reaches the President’s desk.”

One of the components of MAC’s public relations campaign, coordinated by Houma public relations and advertising firm Armand Communications, is a video produced in Terrebonne Parish on September 18. It features interviews with local residents Evelyn Lirette, Rev. Kirby Verret and Mike Voisin, Terrebonne Levee and Conservation District (TLCD) Director Jerome Zeringue, TLCD Commissioner Gilbert Talbot, and Governor Kathleen Blanco. The video covers the flooding incurred by the parish during Hurricane Rita, the area’s increased vulnerability to storm surge due to coastal land loss, and the importance of the Morganza-to-the-Gulf system. It has been distributed to all television stations in Louisiana and regional news bureaus of the national networks.

MAC is also sending letters to the editors of major newspapers that are published in the districts of WRDA Conference Committee members. The letters urge the individual committee members to support the Morganza levee system and secure its authorization during the conference committee process.

“As we mark the anniversary of Hurricane Rita, Terrebonne Parish residents also mark another year of increased vulnerability to the powerful Gulf of Mexico and another year pleading for federal support of a Hurricane Protection System that is 20 years overdue,” writes Walker in a letter-to-the-editor to the *Los Angeles Times*.

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The proposed Morganza-to-the-Gulf Hurricane Protection System includes 72 miles of earthen levees with floodgates, water control structures and a lock complex on the Houma Navigation Canal. It will stretch along the coastal reaches of the Terrebonne Basin, protecting over 120,000 people and 1,700 square miles of residential and industrial areas, farmland and marshes from Category 3 Hurricane storm surges. The system will also reduce saltwater intrusion, manage fresh water flow, reduce insurance claims and rates, and improve navigation.

The Morganza Action Coalition was founded earlier this year by a group of Terrebonne Parish residents and business people who recognize the importance of the Morganza system to the future existence and growth of the area. The Coalition relies on financial contributions from individuals and businesses in order to effectively advocate for federal authorization and funding of the Morganza project. For contribution and membership information, contact Daniel Walker at 985-868-2333.

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