

MAC
MORGANZA ACTION COALITION

For Immediate Release:
August 21, 2009

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**Residents Call on Outside Environmental Groups to
Stop Delaying Construction of Levee System**

(HOUMA) – Area residents and coastal experts today vowed to continue their push to achieve levee protection for this region and denounced efforts by outside organizations to scuttle the federally authorized Morganza-to-the-Gulf Hurricane Protection System.

“The leaders of these organizations, who do not live in Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes, have made another desperate attempt to delay this community’s best hope for protecting ourselves from hurricane storm surge,” says Morganza Action Coalition President Berwick Duval. “As a native and resident of Terrebonne Parish, it is appalling to me that these groups have made it their mission to discredit the federally authorized and state supported Morganza-to-the-Gulf System and deny the hardworking people of Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes their basic right to survival. We will not sit back and allow that to happen.”

On August 13, Baton Rouge-based Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana and New Orleans-based Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation filed objections to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regarding Morganza-related permits that were made available for public comment nearly six months ago.

“The latest objection raised by these two groups shows their complete lack of understanding of Terrebonne Parish, the work we are already doing here, and what we are attempting to accomplish,” explains Terrebonne Parish President Michel Claudet. “All of our efforts, including barrier restoration projects and freshwater reintroductions, are designed to allow us to implement multiple lines of defense where possible, but Morganza is the one project critical to protecting our parish’s 120,000 residents.”

“The actions of these Baton Rouge and New Orleans organizations are a stab at the heart of our community, which is in a life or death fight against nature for its future existence,” says Lafourche Parish President Charlotte Randolph. “It is heartless for those who do not live here and who sit comfortably behind their own federally funded levee system, like the leadership of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, to think they have the right to deny our people their own hurricane protection system.”

The Morganza project includes 72 miles of earthen levees, a lock on the Houma Navigation Canal, floodgates and water control structures designed to protect 200,000 residents, property, infrastructure, and environment of Terrebonne and parts of Lafourche

Parishes from devastation by future hurricanes and tropical storms. After 15 years of extensive analysis by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Congress authorized the Morganza to the Gulf project at \$887 million in November 2007.

In 2008, the USACE began a new two-year cost evaluation of the project after it determined that post-Katrina levee standards could increase the cost of building Morganza by more than 20 percent. A preliminary report was issued by the USACE in January 2009, reaffirming the system's existing alignment, and the Terrebonne Levee and Conservation District is proceeding with construction of 25 miles of levees and five floodgates using local dedicated sales tax revenue and state funds along this authorized alignment.

“If we were to follow the recommendations of these organizations who oppose our project, this community would have to endure another 15 years or more of studies before our system is built. That is unacceptable,” says Terrebonne Levee and Conservation District Director Reggie Dupre. “Make no mistake, Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes will fight for their future. We will continue on our local and state-funded construction schedule and will not allow outsiders who do not understand our region to threaten construction of the only levee system that will keep our homes on the map.”

Dr. Denise Reed, a Montegut resident and member of the 2008 Morganza-to-the-Gulf Technical Review Panel created by the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority supports local efforts to proceed with levee construction. “Many of the measures currently being pursued by the Levee District will provide some of the same benefits, for communities and the environment, that are envisioned in the complete Morganza system of levees, floodgates, environmental structures and the lock,” she explains.

Public institutions and local businesses have also been very supportive of the Morganza project, recognizing that the viability of this entire region is at stake.

“There is no doubt that Morganza to the Gulf is the most critical issue facing Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes. This expansive levee system is a critical link to protecting homes and businesses while securing our base industrial economy. Our region serves the state and nation as a major energy corridor that can only be maintained through continual self preservation,” says Tony Boudreaux, Vice President of Superior Labor Services and President of South Central Industrial Association.

“The health and well-being of our residents is our top concern and hurricane protection is an important piece of that puzzle. Without it, the risk of this hospital being inundated by storm surge is very real,” explains Terrebonne General Medical Center CEO Phyllis Peoples. “Our communities deserve the Morganza project, and TGMC fully supports local and state efforts to construct the levee system. We will not be a healthy, sustaining community in the future without it.”