

**U.S. SENATE HEARING TESTIMONY**  
**Jerome Zeringue, Terrebonne Levee and Conservation District**  
**AUGUST 27, 2007**

Good Morning. My name is Jerome Zeringue and I am the Executive Director of the Terrebonne Levee & Conservation District in Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana.

In 2005, Terrebonne Parish received the 1-2 punch for hurricanes – Hurricane Katrina & Hurricane Rita. We experienced the greatest flooding of all time due to Hurricane Rita that made landfall nearly 200 miles away. Hurricane Rita's storm surge inundated over 10,000 homes and businesses in Terrebonne Parish resulting in \$75 million dollars worth of damage.

Our region experiences the highest rates of coastal land loss in the world and we have NO hurricane protection system. A future direct hit will likely annihilate the Terrebonne and Lafourche Parish region, potentially killing thousands of people, destroying homes and businesses along the way, and crippling the oil and gas infrastructure here so severely that gas prices will skyrocket beyond currently shocking levels.

Our future, the state's future and the nation's future depends on a proposed levee system called the Morganza to the Gulf Hurricane Protection Project.

Located 60 miles southwest of New Orleans, the Terrebonne & Lafourche region is home to over 200,000 people and we are at the apex of energy production for the nation. Terrebonne & Lafourche Parishes are strategically located along Louisiana's coast to host local, national, and international companies which service 30% of this nation's oil and gas supply. In addition, these companies support the nation's most critical energy port – Port Fourchon. Over 9,300 miles of pipelines are protected by our wetlands. The pipelines that run from the Louisiana Offshore Oil Platform (LOOP) through our wetlands are connected to 50% of the nation's refining capacity. Through these pipelines, we supply the lifeblood of this nation. Our wetlands are the most bountiful in the nation; supplying up to 35 % of America's seafood and playing an integral role in North America's migratory bird flyway. The coastal region of Terrebonne & Lafourche is the MOST valuable coast to this State and this Nation.

As we all know, our coastal wetlands are disappearing and the entire ecosystem is disintegrating. This hurricane levee system is a *first-of-its-kind* in that it incorporates floodgates and environmental structures that will allow water to flow between the interior and exterior marshes. This levee system works *with* the wetlands and will provide an opportunity to *improve* the existing hydrology and *maximize* ecosystem sustainability.

For the past 15 years, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has studied and analyzed the Morganza to the Gulf hurricane protection project. They have determined that this project is feasible and we are ready to move forward with construction. Fortunately for those of us who live in the region, Morganza to the Gulf is not a pre-Katrina designed project. Through every phase of its construction, the project undergoes detailed design and engineering. This allows us to make modifications to the alignment using the most up to date scientific data.

The local citizens have been taxing themselves for over five years to raise the local matching funds needed to construct Morganza. With \$15 million collected to date, construction of the first levee section has begun.

Morganza to the Gulf has been pending a WRDA authorization since 2000. After 7 years of waiting, we cannot wait any longer. We are running out of time. We NEED Congress to authorize this critical project so that we can protect a region of Louisiana that plays a significantly vital role to our Nation.

We appreciate the efforts of Senator Landrieu and our entire Congressional Delegation for their support. Thank you for your attention and consideration.