



MEDIA RELEASE

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SIERRA CLUB HAILS CONGRESSIONAL MOVE TO CLOSE MRGO

Channel Funneled Storm Into City, Wrecking Neighborhoods, Killing Hundreds

NEW ORLEANS – Members of the Delta (Louisiana) Chapter of the Sierra Club are hailing a decision by the U.S. Congress directing the Corps of Engineers to develop a comprehensive plan to de-authorize deep draft navigation on the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet.

“This is a wonderful decision; it is an important step for Congress to de-authorize the MRGO,” says Leslie March, chair of the Delta Chapter. “From its inception, the MRGO has been a poorly designed project and it should have been shut down a long time ago.”

The MRGO is a little-used shipping channel that was a significant cause of the catastrophic flooding in the New Orleans metro area following Hurricane Katrina. Studies by Louisiana State University’s Hurricane Center have concluded that the MRGO amplified and funneled Katrina’s storm surge directly into the city’s Ninth Ward, New Orleans East and St. Bernard Parish. The surge destroyed neighborhoods and is responsible for hundreds of deaths.

“The MRGO has been causing disasters since it was built,” says March. “It was responsible for funneling storm surge into the city during Hurricane Betsy in 1965. And in the 40-plus years it has been in operation, salt water channeled in by the MRGO destroyed more than more than 20,000 acres of coastal wetlands. We hope this new plan will help strengthen our hurricane defenses by restoring nature’s shock absorbers – the coastal wetlands that reduce the power of storm surges.”

She praised Senators Mary Landrieu (D-La.), David Vitter (R-La.), James Jeffords (I-Vt.) and James Inhofe (R-Ok) for their “outstanding efforts of educating their colleagues about the dangers of the MRGO and pushing to support de-authorization.”

The plan approved in the bill will be developed in consultation with St. Bernard Parish, the state of Louisiana, and appropriate federal agencies. An interim report summarizing the plan will be forwarded to the appropriate House and Senate authorizing and appropriations committees within six months of enactment of the act. Final recommendations will be integrated into the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Plan, due to Congress in December 2007.

“There are several schools of thought regarding how closure of the MRGO can be accomplished,” says March. “We are looking forward to the development of a practical, economic solution that will protect people and our coastal wetlands.”

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The Sierra Club's 750,000 members work together to protect communities and the planet. The Club is America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The Delta (Louisiana) chapter of the Sierra Club has more than 3,500 members and has been active in local conservation projects for more than 30 years. For more information, contact the organization's website: www.louisiana.sierraclub.org.