

**Gulf Restoration Network ♦ Levees.org ♦ Louisiana Environmental Action Network ♦ Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation
♦ Sierra Club, Delta Chapter ♦ Holy Cross Neighborhood Association ♦ American Rivers ♦ Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana**

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Language Accepted to Close the MRGO

Louisiana's Senators Should Be Acknowledged for Their Support

NEW ORLEANS – After years of attempts to rid Southeastern Louisiana of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, the end may be in sight.

Louisiana's two senators are responsible for the victory. Both worked to add language to an appropriations bill that would de-authorize the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet.

“After a lot of hard work, Sen. Mary Landrieu's amendment to close the MRGO was added to the Senate supplemental appropriations bill,” says Aaron Viles, Campaign Director, Gulf Restoration Network and a member of the Sierra Club. “Many hours were put in by staff in Sen. Landrieu's office and the Senate Environment and Public Works Staff to get this to happen. Sen. David Vitter also deserves credit for working with the Republican caucus to get this to work.”

The amendment language requests that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers be asked to de-authorize the MRGO project. Because the MRGO was created by the Army Corps of Engineers at the direction of Congress, it requires an act of Congress to de-authorize it. If de-authorization of the MRGO is achieved, an additional step is needed to de-fund the project.

The MRGO contributed significantly to flooding. Scientists at the LSU Hurricane Center believe that the MRGO allowed storm surge to reach New Orleans 2 to 3 times faster than if the storm surge had traveled through wetlands. Fatalities in the Lower Ninth Ward were higher than other areas of the city, in part because the fast-arriving storm surge gave residents less time to respond. Beyond its direct impact, the MRGO has destroyed much of the wetlands to the east of the channel that act as a buffer to storm surge.

The coalition vows it will work to ensure that the language in the supplemental bill is included in the final bill to be signed by the President. The coalition has called on other

politicians in the area – including Rep. William Jefferson who represents the district in the U.S. House of Representatives – to assist in passage of H.R. 4939.

The group also is calling for legislation that will create an independent scientific body that will objectively create a plan for the closure of the MRGO.

Amendment Facts

- Offered by Senators Vitter (R-LA), Landrieu (D-LA), Inhofe (R-OK) and Jeffords (I-VT)
- The closure plan for MRGO is part of a broader amendment.
- The Corps is provided \$3.5 million to develop a plan for closure of the MRGO in six months.
 - a) This plan will need to go back to the Senate Environment and Public Works committee and House Transportation and Infrastructure committee for sign-off. (Does not need a law passed but both committees would have to pass a resolution that endorses that interim plan.);
 - b) The plan would be crafted in consultation with the National Academy of Science, St. Bernard officials, other federal agencies (Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Corrections, Department of Interior) and the State of Louisiana;
 - c) Input on the plan will be sought from public and scientific community;
 - d) The plan will be independently reviewed by the National Academy of Science.
- The MRGO closure plan will:
 - a) De-authorize deep draft navigation at a minimum and will recommend if any navigation should be supported on MRGO;
 - b) Provide measures for protection from hurricanes and storms;
 - c) Prevent salt water intrusion;
 - d) Re-establish the storm buffering properties and ecological integrity of wetlands lost due to construction and operation of MRGO;
 - e) Complement overall restoration of coastal Louisiana.

A final plan will be submitted for closure funding by December 2007.

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