

Comite River Diversion Canal Project Task Force

**Minutes of Meeting
2018 Interim
February 1, 2018**

I. CALL TO ORDER

Representative Valarie Hodges, chairwoman of the Comite River Diversion Canal Project Task Force, called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. in Room 6, in the state capitol in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

II. ROLL CALL

LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Representative Valarie Hodges, chairwoman
Representative Barbara Carpenter
Senator Bodi White, vice chairman

LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Representative Rogers J. Pope
Senator Regina Barrow
Senator Dale Erdey

NON-LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mark Harrell
Christopher Knotts
Jerry Passman
Brandon Rogilio
J. R. Saucier
Paul Sawyer
Tom Stephens
Brenda Zeringue

NON-LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Jason Lanclos
Jerry Thibeau

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

House:

Ashleigh Clare-Kearney, attorney
Glenn Fleming, attorney
Angelique R. Mozee, committee secretary
Danny Leming, sergeant at arms

Senate:

James Bullock, sergeant at arms

III. OPENING REMARKS

Representative Hodges introduced and thanked the staff for being instrumental in organizing the meeting, and thanked the members for their dedicated services to the task force.

Representative Hodges opened the meeting with a prayer. She gave an overview of the Comite River Diversion Canal Project and the steps that are needed to complete it.

IV. PRESENTATIONS AND BRIEFINGS

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Mr. Bobby Duplantier, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, 7400 Leake Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118, (504) 862-1037, spoke for information only. He introduced his colleague, Mr. Durand Elzy, to the committee.

Representative Hodges and Mr. Duplantier discussed in depth the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) and the Corps of Engineer.

Mr. Durand Elzy, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, 7400 Leake Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118, (504) 862-1674, spoke for information only. He addressed questions from Representative Hodges, Senators Erdey and White, and Mr. Sawyer in reference to the time frame and completion of Function Element I, II, III, IV, and V for the Comite River Project.

Representative Hodges gave an overview of the Comite River Diversion Canal Project Funding Sources, as of February 1, 2018, and provided a handout, Exhibit A, which is included in the committee records. Representative Hodges announced that Congressman John Kennedy was going to address the task force regarding his proposal to use monies from the State of Louisiana Unclaimed Property Program to fund the project.

Department of Transportation and Development

Mr. Christopher Knotts, Department of Transportation and Development, 1201 Capitol Access Road, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, (225) 379-1384, spoke for information only. He made a point of clarification on the Comite River Diversion Canal Project Funding Sources Report, he also narrated a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Comite River Diversion Canal Project Update", and provided a handout, Exhibit B, which is included in the committee records. Mr. Knotts gave an overview on DOTD agreements and modification, U.S. Highway 61, project expenditures, and recent and current DOTD activities.

Senator White and Mr. Knotts discussed the time frame for completion of the project, funding, the Florida gas line plan, and the DOTD and Amite River Basin Commission letters in reference to modifying the corporate endeavors agreement.

Mr. Knotts and Representative Carpenter discussed Highway 61 and the impact the construction will have on the business industry, and acquiring permits for relocation and drafting of plans for the pipelines.

Mr. Knotts gave an overview for Senator Barrow in reference to the bidding process for projects.

Congressman John Kennedy

Congressman John Kennedy, State of Louisiana, SR 383 Russell Senate Building, Washington, DC 20510, (202) 224-4623, spoke for information only. He addressed the task force on his suggestion to use \$150-\$175 million dollars from the state's unclaimed property program. He discussed the process for securing those funds from the Department of Treasury in depth.

Senator Erdey asked if the funds from the unclaimed property program will have to be legislated and appropriated by the legislature. Congressman Kennedy stated it did not have to be legislated, but it could be done by the State Treasurer.

Senator White and Congressman Kennedy discussed the \$175 million dollars lump sum payment, using bonds to fund the I-49 North project, and how the bonds were paid with unclaimed property monies. Congressman Kennedy gave an overview on how the unclaimed property program monies accumulate each year.

Senator Barrow and Congressman Kennedy discussed the \$600 million dollars disaster funds.

Senator White and Congressman Kennedy discussed the \$400 million dollars for the City of Central and securing other methods of funding the project by use of stocks, mutual funds, and bonds.

Governor's Office

Ms. Erin Monroe Wesley, Office of the Governor, 4th Floor, State Capitol, Baton Rouge, LA 70804, (225) 937-9538, spoke for information only. She made brief comments on the unclaimed property program monies and the disaster funding. Ms. Wesley stated that the administration would welcome an open invitation with Senator Kennedy to discuss his proposal to use unclaimed property money toward the project. She said that the governor secured \$600 million dollars in the disaster bill, in which a portion of those funds will be allocated to the project. Ms. Wesley stated that the administration is committed to working with the Congressional Delegation and Senator Kennedy to get the project completed.

Ms. Wesley addressed questions from Senators Barrow and Erdey in reference to unclaimed property program monies, bonds sold for the I-49 project, and how the state is recovering those funds.

Senator White asked Ms. Wesley to see if the City of Central received the \$400 million dollars committed by the governor for drainage.

Updates Congressional Designee

Mr. Sawyer gave a congressional overview on the FEMA bill passed in November of 2018, the \$81 million dollars disaster bill passed on December 21, 2018, the Duplicate of Benefits Language Policy, and the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). He stated that the East Baton Rouge, Livingston, and Ascension parishes pledge a portion of their HMGP monies to be applied towards the Comite River Project. Mr. Sawyer discussed briefly the \$600 million dollars in the House Appropriation Bill in which Louisiana stands to receive a portion of those funds for Comite River and other projects.

Mr. Sawyer answered questions from Senators White and Erdey in reference to tax millage paid by the locals, his views on the status of the project, and Louisiana's portion of the \$600 million dollars.

Mr. Harrell spoke about the duplication of benefits and he commended Congressman Graves and Mr. Sawyer on a job well done in moving this project forward.

Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness

Mr. Casey Tingle, Governor Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, 7667 Independence Boulevard, Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 485-7451, spoke for information only. He gave a brief overview on how the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funding relates to the project and provided current updates.

Mr. Tingle addressed questions from Representative Hodges, Senator White, and Mr. Sawyer in reference to funding and expediting the process for FEMA assistance.

East Baton Rouge Parish

Mr. Fred Raiford, City of Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish, (no address provided), (225) 389-3159, spoke for information only. He stated that the City of Baton Rouge is still committed to the \$20 million dollars upon approval of the Senate. He said the city has taken the steps to meet the cost benefit ratio in order to move the process forward.

Livingston Parish

On behalf of Mayor Ricks of Livingston Parish, Mr. Mark Harrell addressed the task force and stated that the parish has committed \$10 million dollars to support the Comite River Project. He said that a letter will be signed to deobligate the funds to the state as their portion towards the project.

Mr. Raiford and Mr. Harrell addressed questions from the task force members.

Amite River Board of Commissioners

Mr. Dietmar Rietschier, Amite River Basin Commission (ABRC), 3535 South Sherwood Forest Boulevard, Suite 135, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70815, (225) 296-4900, spoke for information only. He provided a handout, Exhibit C, entitled, "Amite River Basin Drainage and Water Conservation District", which is included in the committee records.

Mr. Larry Bankston, Amite River Basin Commission, 8708 Jefferson Highway, Baton Rouge, LA 70808, (225) 776-3800, spoke for information only.

Mr. Ben Babin, Amite River Basin Commission, 44334 Hwy 42, Prairieville, LA 70769, (225) 921-3844, spoke for information only.

All members of the ARBC discussed in depth with members of the task force the November 14, 2017 letter sent to the Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) to terminate the third Corporate Endeavors Agreement between the ARBC and DOTD.

V. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Wayne Massina, City of Central, 7256 Woodlett Drive, Central, Louisiana 70818, (225) 261-4771, spoke for information only. He gave a synopsis on weirs and how it diverts the waters from the Amite and Maurepas Swamp to the Maurepas Lake Bash. He suggested that the task force consider dredging the Amite, Comite, and other lakes and bayous as a method to unblock the debris for proper flowage.

Senator White stated that he filed and passed legislation to clean and dredge. He said a study had to be done and that the Homeland Security committee will meet to give an update on the Amite, Comite, Manchac, Pearl, and North Shore rivers. Senator White mentioned that a statewide study for floodplain is being done to find ways to fix the problem and how to execute it.

VI. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There was no announcements.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Valarie Hodges, chairwoman
Comite River Diversion Canal Project Task Force

Date approved: _____