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Morganza to the Gulf Hurricane Protection Project Achieves Congressional Authorization

The Morganza-to-the-Gulf Hurricane Protection Project achieved Congressional authorization today as part of the 2014 Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA) that gained final approval in the Senate. Once President Obama signs WRRDA, it will become law and Morganza authorization will be official. Authorization is a critical achievement for the 98-mile levee, lock and floodgate system designed to protect up to 200,000 residents of Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes.

“This is an exciting and historic day for our community,” says Sharon Bergeron, President of the Morganza Action Coalition (MAC), a grass-roots organization created in 2006 to promote the local hurricane protection project. “For more than 22 years, local residents, parish leaders and levee district officials have worked tirelessly with our Congressional representatives to gain federal approval for the Morganza-to-the-Gulf Hurricane Protection System.”

Authorization paves the way for the aggressive local and state efforts to construct the first lifts of the Morganza system to be credited toward the match for the fully authorized project. It also recognizes the hurricane protection project as a risk reduction system, rather than a series of independent levees and floodgate segments, and it streamlines the permitting process for construction activities. Perhaps most significantly, federal authorization now allows for federal funds to be appropriated for the project.

“We have had many challenges on this long road to authorization over the years, but the people of Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes have never given up. This determination and persistence pays off with final authorization from Congress today,” Bergeron continues. “We are now one very significant step closer to gaining the federal level of protection that other communities in South Louisiana currently enjoy, and the protection that our vital community needs and deserves.”

“MAC thanks all of our supporters who have helped us advocate for Morganza over the years, and our levee district, parish, state, and Congressional leaders who recognize our region’s tremendous need for effective hurricane protection and have made Morganza a top infrastructure priority. We also thank the Louisiana CPRA and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for their continued commitment to provide protection and restoration projects for our region.”

“Most importantly, MAC congratulates the people of Terrebonne Parish who, on two separate occasions, have voted to pay new taxes to build levees and floodgates along the Morganza alignment. This dedication proves to Washington that we are not going anywhere; we will do all it takes to protect our homes and businesses in this productive community we call home,” she concludes.

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Terrebonne Levee and Conservation District Executive Director Reggie Dupre commended MAC for its leadership and support.

“Authorization is a milestone achievement for our entire parish, and we all have a reason to celebrate today,” Dupre says. “Having the strong support of local residents and businesses through MAC has been critical to us over the years as we traveled to Capitol Hill and Baton Rouge to promote Morganza. This collaboration is an outstanding model of how to deliver large-scale projects with strong local support through a challenging federal process,” he continues.

The hurricane protection project was originally authorized in 2000, but authorization was contingent on the submission of a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers report that, ultimately, was not submitted by the Congressional deadline. A second Congressional authorization was approved in September 2007. Just a few months later, however, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers determined that the project required a re-evaluation based on post-Hurricane Katrina standards. This re-evaluation was conducted between 2008 and 2013, and the final report was issued in December 2013. With this nod from the U.S. Corps of Engineers, the Morganza project was included and approved in the WRRDA of 2014.

With authorization achieved, MAC advocacy efforts will focus on opportunities to garner federal appropriations to construct or enhance individual sections of the federally approved levee, lock and floodgate system.

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