Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment #3.3: Large-scale Barataria Marsh Creation: Upper Barataria Component (BA 207) Public Webinar Transcript

April 2, 2020

Niamh Micklewhite: Hi everyone and welcome to the webinar for the Louisiana TIG Barataria Marsh Restoration Plan. Please be patient as we wait for more attendees to join, and we will begin shortly.

Niamh Micklewhite: Hi everyone, once again, and welcome to the webinar for the Louisiana TIG Barataria Marsh Restoration Plan. Please be patient as we wait for a few more attendees to join, and we'll begin as soon as possible.

Niamh Micklewhite: Hi everyone and welcome to the webinar for the Louisiana TIG Barataria Marsh Restoration Plan. It looks like many people are still in the process of joining the webinar, so we will just wait a couple more minutes.

Niamh Micklewhite: Hello everyone and thank you for joining us today to discuss the Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group Draft Phase II Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment #3.3: Large-scale Barataria Marsh Creation: Upper Barataria Component (BA 207)), or Draft RP/EA #3.3 or "plan" for short. My name is Niamh Micklewhite from Industrial Economics, Inc., and I'm a contractor to NOAA. My colleague, Michaela Murray, and I will be helping with logistics for today's webinar.

If you are having any technical difficulties, please use the questions box on the righthand side of the webinar interface to reach a staff member. We have muted all participants for the duration of the webinar.

At the end of the webinar, you will have the opportunity to provide comments on the plan. We will take those in written comments submitted via the questions box on the right-hand side of the webinar interface. My colleague Michaela will then read those comments aloud. At the end of the webinar, we'll review how you can use the questions box to submit comments. You may enter your comments at any time during the webinar, but we will also leave some time at the end of the presentation for comments to be submitted. We will not be responding to comments on the webinar today, but we will consider your comments in finalizing the plan.

Once again, thank you for joining us. We hope you find the webinar informative, and we look forward to receiving your comments on the plan. Now, I'll pass things over to Mel Landry of NOAA's Restoration Center who will be presenting today.

Mel Landry: Thank you, Niamh. Thank you for your time today to everyone joining the webinar. I'm Mel Landry, and I work for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and I'm here today to provide an overview of the Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group and our recently released restoration plan focused on the restoration of coastal, wetlands, and nearshore habitats through the Large-Scale Barataria Marsh Creation: Upper Barataria Component project.

Mel Landry: As you may know, the Trustees held many meetings prior to the settlement with BP in 2016 and many more since that time. This afternoon we're holding a public webinar for the release of the Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group's restoration plan #3.3: Large-Scale Barataria Marsh Creation – Upper Barataria Component.

Today's agenda is as follows. First, I'm going to go over some slides that give you an update of what the Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group, which we'll call the Louisiana TIG, has been working on.

Then, I will present the draft restoration plan and environmental assessment and open up the floor for comments from listeners. We'll be taking written comments provided through the chat box on this webinar, which we'll read out for everyone to hear. At the end of this presentation, I'll provide instructions on how to add your comments.

After the presentation and public comments, we will close this webinar.

Mel Landry: Let's start with a quick review of our responsibilities as the TIG. The Trustees are responsible for restoring the environment and compensating the public for natural resource injuries resulting from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. We used a natural resource damage assessment to determine the extent of injuries to natural resources and to seek restoration or compensation from the parties responsible for those injuries. The goal is to restore injured natural resources—such as wetlands—to the condition they would have been in if the spill had not occurred. We are also responsible for addressing recreational uses—like boating and swimming—that were affected by the spill.

Mel Landry: The Louisiana TIG includes representation from 5 state Trustees and 4 federal Trustees. The federal Trustees are the Department of Interior represented by John Tirpak, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration represented by myself, Mel Landry, the Environmental Protection Agency represented by Doug Jacobson, and the Department of Agriculture, represented by Ron Howard. The state Trustees are the Coastal Protection Restoration Authority, the Department of Wildlife & Fisheries, the Department of Environmental Quality, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Louisiana Oil Spill Coordinator's Office, all represented by Bren Haase of CPRA.

Mel Landry: Now, let me give you a little bit of background on the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and restoration process, to bring us up to where we are today. As the timeline shows, the oil spill began 10 years ago this month on April 20, 2010. The oil flowed for 87 days, but we didn't wait until the flow stopped to begin the injury assessment. We began right away.

In April of 2011, BP agreed to make up to $1 billion available for restoration even before the injury assessment was complete, which allowed us to get a jump start on restoration. From 2011 to 2016, we approved a total of five restoration plans and 65 projects across the Gulf of Mexico with a combined cost of $866 million. Generally speaking, these projects restored marshes, beaches, shorelines, seagrasses, oysters, fish and shellfish, wildlife, and recreational uses. In Louisiana, we approved four projects including marsh creation, barrier island restoration, oyster restoration, and bird restoration.

On April 4, 2016, four years ago this week, the federal government and the five Gulf states reached a settlement with BP; it totaled approximately $20.8 billion. Of the $20.8 billion, up to $8.8 billion will go to natural resource restoration across the Gulf - with $5 billion for restoration in the Louisiana Restoration Area, which is managed by the Louisiana TIG.

Since the settlement, we have continued working hard to advance restoration in the Gulf. In March 2018, we released the Strategic Restoration Plan for the Barataria Basin, which selected several projects for further evaluation and planning, including a marsh creation project in the upper Barataria Basin. A

few weeks ago, we released the Draft Phase II RP/EA #3.3. This follow-up restoration plan describes the marsh creation project in Barataria Basin in more detail.

Mel Landry: This detail was derived from the engineering and design activities that have occurred between the phase I and phase II plan. When an incident like an oil spill takes place, laws direct that federal and state Trustees to identified and respond to and assess the injuries caused by the spill, work on remediation and eventually take on restoration.

Since this is such a huge restoration effort, the largest ever in the United States, the state and federal trustees established Trustee Implementation Groups, often referred to as TIGs to guide the work in the different restoration areas. These TIGs provide flexibility and accountability that allow for the differences between restoration areas and Trustees in those restoration areas. The Trustees serve collectively on the Trustee Council which, among many things, ensures coordination among the TIGs. Today we're focusing on the work of the Louisiana TIG.

Mel Landry: This pie chart shows the allocation of funds between restoration areas. You can see that the Louisiana restoration area gets the largest allocation, totaling $5 billion.

Mel Landry: The $5 billion in funds for the Louisiana Restoration Area are subdivided into five restoration categories. As you can see, the majority, over $4.3 billion, will go towards projects that restore and conserve habitat. Other categories include Monitoring and Adaptive Management, Recreational Use, Living Coastal and Marine Resources, and Water Quality.

Within the Restore and Conserve Habitat Restoration category, the vast majority of the funds, about $4 billion, will go toward restoring Wetlands, Coastal, and Nearshore Habitats. The project we're discussing today, Large-Scale Barataria Marsh Creation: Upper Barataria Component, would be funded from those dollars.

Mel Landry: Since settlement in 2016, the Louisiana TIG has released several restoration plans. In January 2017, we released our first plan, "*Restoration of Wetlands, Coastal, and Nearshore Habitats; Habitat Projects on Federally Managed Lands; and Birds.*" That plan was written to fund engineering and design activities for six restoration projects, including two bird island projects, three coastal wetlands projects, and one habitat project. Plans #1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 evaluate design alternatives for those projects.

In July 2018, we released the Final RP/EA #2, which allocates $22 million of funds toward four recreational use projects.

In March 2018, we released the final Strategic RP/EA #3 to guide future restoration of wetland, coastal, and nearshore habitats in Barataria Basin. The plan we're discussing today, RP/EA #3.3, tiers from this plan and provides an evaluation of design for the large-scale marsh creation project that was selected by the TIG in the Strategic Restoration Plan.

In July 2018, we released the Final RP/EA #4, which proposes several projects that either address nutrient reduction in Louisiana's coastal watersheds or enhance recreational opportunities.

Last month, we released the Draft RP/EA #5, which proposes four projects – three for the restoration of oysters and one for the restoration of marine mammals. You can join us for a webinar on those proposed projects on April 8th.

Lastly, in December of 2019, we released the Draft RP/EA #6, which evaluates four projects intended to restore and conserve wetlands, coastal, and nearshore habitats.

Mel Landry: Now I'll present details on the Restoration Plan #3.3 for the Large-Scale Barataria Marsh Creation: Upper Barataria Component project.

Mel Landry: The proposed project is in the Barataria Basin, which had some of the greatest oiling from the Deepwater Horizon spill. Sediment will be harvested from two borrow areas in the Mississippi River, and pumped over 13 miles to the project area just south of a waterbody known as The Pen. The land mass in this area is known as the Barataria Land Bridge. Along with other previous and ongoing restoration projects, the project will help to restore marsh and habitat connectivity in the Barataria Basin.

Mel Landry: Three design alternatives were evaluated. A summary comparison is shown here and shows that Alternative 1 creates more acres of marsh than Alternative 2 and compared to Alternative 3, Alternative 1 requires less sediment, a shorter construction period, with relatively small decrease in acres of marsh. This makes Alternative 1 the most cost-effective alternative.

Mel Landry: The project objective is to create approximately 1,200 acres of intertidal marsh habitat as part of the larger effort to restore approximately 29,000 acres of marsh across the Barataria Land Bridge in Plaquemines and Jefferson Parishes. This is consistent with the LA TIG's 2017 Strategic Restoration Plan. The proposed project:

- Supports large-scale marsh creation in the Barataria Basin.
- Complements other marsh creation projects in the basin and along the access corridor.
- Supports further marsh creation via the proposed Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion.

The project size and its distance from the borrow area mean that more sediment must be delivered over a greater distance over a longer construction time when compared with similar projects.

E&D funds of approximately $5.38 million have been approved and the Phase II project cost estimate is $176 million. This includes construction, monitoring, and operations and maintenance, and monitoring and adaptive management for the project.

Mel Landry: The final project design is anticipated to be completed in November. During outreach related to the proposed project, such as this webinar, there may be changes to the final design. We anticipate that construction would be completed in early 2023.

Mel Landry: After the current public comment period closes on April 20, 2020, we will revise the restoration plan as needed and issue public notice on the final restoration plan anticipated around July of this year.

If the Louisiana TIG selects the project to go forward into construction, we would request up to $176 million in Natural Resource Damage Assessment funding for construction and 20 years of post-construction monitoring, adaptive management, operations, and maintenance. If selected, our goal is to begin construction by spring of 2021 and finish in early 2023.

Mel Landry: That concludes the presentation for this project. The restoration plan and environmental assessment described in this project and the considered design alternatives is available for public review and comment now through April 20, 2020. You can download a copy at LA-DWH.com or the NOAA Gulf Spill Restoration website.

That site also contains instructions for submitting comments either online or by mail to the address you see on the screen. Please note that today we will not respond to any comments or questions that the public submits, but all comments and questions submitted by the public here will be recorded and considered along with any comments received in writing. We appreciate your input and thank you.

Michaela Murray: Hello everyone, my name is Michaela, and today I will be reading the comments that we have received during today's presentation.

If you haven't submitted a comment yet and you would like to, you can do this now via the chat box on the bottom of the webinar control panel, which is illustrated on this slide. Due to the limited capacity of the chat box feature, we recommend keeping comments rather brief. If you have longer comments, feel free to submit them after this webinar either online or by mail. If you have already typed your comment in another document and you wish to submit it now, you can copy and paste it into the chat box. After you've finished typing out your comment, hit "send." We will read comments aloud in the order in which they are submitted. As mentioned before, we will not be responding to these comments today, but they will all be considered in the Final plan which is expected to be released this summer.

We will now pause for several minutes to allow people to submit their comments. We look forward to hearing your thoughts!

Okay we have one comment from Vicki Cornish who says, "Is there a monitoring and adaptive management plan associated with the RP?" Thank you for your comment Vicki.

We have one question that asks if the presentation will be provided to the attendees, and we will say that it will be posted in a couple days on the TIG website, which is gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov.

There is one question that says, "Is a map of the current project footprint available on the gulf spill website?" Yes, it is available in the full plan, which is on the gulf spill website.

Leslie asks, "What agency will be responsible for bidding the project and construction management?"

Those are the comments we have received thus far, but I will pause for a few additional moments to let any remaining comments come in.

Okay, we are going to wait for about one more minute for any last comments to come in.

Okay, that concludes today's webinar. Please remember that you can continue to submit comments through April 20th. You can visit gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov for more information on how to submit additional comments either online or by mail.

Thank you all for joining today's webinar. Have a good evening.