

Comite River Diversion Canal Project Task Force

**Minutes of Meeting
2019-2020 Interim
March 4, 2020**

I. CALL TO ORDER

Representative Valarie Hodges, chairwoman of the Comite River Diversion Canal Project Task Force, called the meeting to order at 10:39 a.m. in Room 6, in the state capitol in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

II. ROLL CALL

LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Representative Valarie Hodges, chairwoman
Senator Rogers J. Pope for Senator Regina Barrow
Senator Bodi White, vice chairman

LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Representative Barbara Carpenter

NON-LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Christopher Knotts
Jerry Passman
Brandon Rogillio
J. R. Saucier
Paul Sawyer
Brenda Zeringue

NON-LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Mark Harrell
Jason Lanclos
Tom Stephens
Jerry Thibeau
Eddie Williams

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

House:

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

Senate:

Fate Mitchell, sergeant at arms

III. OPENING REMARKS

Representative Hodges gave an overview of the Comite River Diversion Canal Project. She discussed the impediments to completing the canal and the bipartisan efforts to move the project forward and commended

the task force, the Department of Transportation and Development, Congressman Garret Graves's office, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for their commitment to the project. She announced that the committee will receive current updates in today's meeting.

IV. REQUEST FOR UPDATES

Congressional Updates

Mr. Paul Sawyer with Congressman Garrett Graves office gave an overview/history of the purpose of the Comite River Diversion Canal Task Force, projects, and funding. He stated that the task force should have a discussion about other ideas to control water flow in and out of the Amite River Basin. He said projects like the Darlington Reservoir, the Highway 22 project, and the East Baton Rouge Flood Control Project are projects that will help flood management in the basin.

Mr. Sawyer stated that the Comite River project is under construction and is projected to be completed by the end of 2021. He also addressed questions from Representative Hodges, Senator White, and Mr. Saucier.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Department of Transportation and Development

Mr. Bobby Duplantier, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), 7400 Leake Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70118, (504) 862-1037, spoke for information only and narrated a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Amite River and Tributaries - Comite River Diversion Project", Exhibit A, which is included in the committee records. He discussed the organizational chart for the USACE and the Department of Transportation and Development, Comite River Diversion Overview and Projects, the MVN Estimated Construction Schedule, and the Comite River Diversion Drop Structure Redesign.

Mr. Nick Sims, USACE, 150 Terrence Avenue, Baton Rouge, LA, no zip code provided, (504) 862-2128, spoke for information only and narrated a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Amite River and Tributaries - East Of The Mississippi River, LA Feasibility Study/Darlington Reservoir", Exhibit B, which is included in the committee records. He discussed the AR&T East of the MS River Feasibility Study, Tentatively Selected Plan, Public Comments Status and Themes, and Schedule Milestone/Baseline.

Mr. Duplantier and Mr. Sims addressed questions from Representative Hodges, Senator White, and Mr. Saucier.

Department of Transportation and Development

Mr. Edward Knight, Department of Transportation and Development, 1201 Capitol Access Road, Baton Rouge, LA 70804, (225) 379-3007, spoke for information only and gave an overview of the Amite River Basin Study, in which funding was secured from the office of community development to prepare a model for this study.

Mr. Sam Crampton, Dewberry, 2835 Brandywine Road, Suite 100, Atlanta, GA 30341, (404) 308-1286, spoke for information only and narrated a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Darlington Reservoir Investigation", Exhibit C, which is included in the committee records. He discussed the Darlington Reservoir Study, Example Dry Reservoir, Summary of Findings - Flood Elevations, and Project Status.

Mr. Seth Bradley, Dewberry, 9026 Jefferson Highway, Suite 302, Baton Rouge, LA 70112, (225) 333-3004, spoke for information only and narrated a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Darlington Reservoir Investigation", Exhibit C, which is included in the committee records. He discussed the Structure Impacts on the Darlington Reservoir Study.

Mr. Crampton, Bradley, Knight, and Sims addressed questions from Representative Hodges, Senator White, and Mr. Saucier.

Witness cards submitted by individuals who did not speak are as follows: 1 for information only. Witness cards are included in the committee records.

Office of Community Development

Mr. Pat Forbes, office of community development, no address provided, (225) 342-1626, spoke for information only and gave an overview of the Louisiana Watershed Initiatives and the \$1.2 billion grant for mitigation and reducing flood risk. He also discussed the Regional Capacity Building Grant that gives \$400,00 to the 8 regions across the state.

Mr. Forbes addressed questions from Representatives Hodges and Bacala, Senator White, Mr. Landry, and Mr. Sawyer.

Amite River Basin Commission

Mr. Dietmar Rietschier, Amite River Basin Commission (ARBC), 3535 South Sherwood Forest Boulevard, Suite 135, Baton Rouge, LA 70815, (225) 296-4900, spoke for information only. Mr. Rietschier discussed tax renewal for the Comite River Diversion Canal Project, maintenance dredging, and ARBC expropriation power. He said that ARBC has an agreement with the City of Central for acquiring the proper right-a-ways.

Mr. Larry S. Bankston, ARBC, 8708 Jefferson Highway, Baton Rouge, LA 70809, (225) 766-3800, spoke for information only. He stated that ARBC has entered into a local servicing agreement with East Baton Rouge Parish and the City of Central to assist the parishes in acquiring property. Mr. Bankston also clarified Mr. Rietschier's statement about the tax renewal. He said that ARBC will not seek to renew taxes due to the language in the legislation that specifically says the Comite River is fully funded by the federal government.

Mr. Bankston advised the task force that ARBC sent a letter to the Watershed Initiative stating that the ARBC was the only fully statutory water district in the state. He stated that the Amite River Basin should have its own region, and he suggested that the Watershed Initiative would consider the request.

Ms. Cindy O'Neal, Department of Transportation and Development, national flood insurance program, 1201 Capitol Access Road, Baton Rouge, LA 70804, (225) 379-3014, spoke for information only. She gave an overview on Freeboard Elevation.

Louisiana Geological Survey

Mr. John Johnston, no card provided, spoke for information only. He gave an overview on a report he wrote for the Governor's Task Force on Flooding in 1990. He said that the report is in reference to the Darlington Dry Reservoir and proceeded to read an excerpt from the report. He stated that a Dry Reservoir with maximum capacity will save lives and money, and he advised the task force to focus on the completion of the Comite River Diversion Canal Project.

V. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Robert Burns, no address provided, (225) 955-4484, spoke for information only. He suggested to Representative Hodges to change the task force name to the Louisiana Watershed Task Force and gave his opinion about the Comite River project.

Mr. Wayne Messina, 7256 Woodlett Drive, Baton Rouge, LA 70818, (225) 505-7137, spoke for information only. He discussed the Scenic River Act that was passed by Senator White and dredging/sagging the Comite River.

Ms. Teresa Copp, 1076 Carney Road, Zachary, LA 70791, (225) 936-4918, spoke for information only. She distributed a handout to the task force, Exhibit D, which is included in the committee records. Ms. Copp gave an overview about her personal experiences with the Comite River Diversion Canal Project

VI. OTHER BUSINESS**Approval of the 2014 Interim Minutes**

The minutes from the 2014 Interim meetings dated September 11, September 29, and November 6 were presented to the committee for approval. Representative Hodges made a motion to approve the 2014 Interim minutes. Without objection, the minutes were approved by a vote of 9 yeas and 0 nays. Representative Hodges, Senator Pope, Senator White, Mr. Landry, Mr. Passman, Mr. Rogillio, Mr. Saucier, Mr. Sawyer, and Ms. Zeringue voted yea.

Approval of the 2015 Interim Minutes

The minutes from the 2015 Interim meetings dated January 13 and November 10 were presented to the committee for approval. Representative Hodges made a motion to approve the 2015 Interim minutes. Without objection, the minutes were approved by a vote of 9 yeas and 0 nays. Representative Hodges, Senator Pope, Senator White, Mr. Landry, Mr. Passman, Mr. Rogillio, Mr. Saucier, Mr. Sawyer, and Ms. Zeringue voted yea.

Approval of the 2017-2018 Interim Minutes

The minutes from the 2017-2018 Interim meetings dated January 25, 2017, November 6, 2017, and February 1, 2018 were presented to the committee for approval. Representative Hodges made a motion to approve the 2017-2018 Interim minutes. Without objection, the minutes were approved by a vote of 9 yeas and 0 nays. Representative Hodges, Senator Pope, Senator White, Mr. Landry, Mr. Passman, Mr. Rogillio, Mr. Saucier, Mr. Sawyer, and Ms. Zeringue voted yea.

Approval of the 2018-2019 Interim Minutes

The minutes from the 2018-2019 Interim meetings dated July 17, 2018, November 7, 2018, and March 13, 2019 were presented to the committee for approval. Representative Hodges made a motion to approve the 2018-2019 Interim minutes. Without objection, the minutes were approved by a vote of 9 yeas and 0 nays. Representative Hodges, Senator Pope, Senator White, Mr. Landry, Mr. Passman, Mr. Rogillio, Mr. Saucier, Mr. Sawyer, and Ms. Zeringue voted yea.

VII. ANNOUNCEMENT

There were no announcements.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman Valarie Hodges
Comite River Diversion Canal Project Task Force

Date approved: _____

