

## Comite River Diversion Canal Project Task Force

Minutes of Meeting  
2023-2024 Interim  
July 27, 2023

### I. CALL TO ORDER

Representative Valarie Hodges, chairwoman of the Comite River Diversion Canal Project Task Force, called the meeting to order at 10:17 a.m. in Room 1, in the state capitol in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

### II. ROLL CALL

#### LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Representative Valarie Hodges, chairwoman  
Representative Robby Carter  
Representative Buddy Mincey  
Senator Rogers J. Pope

#### LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Senator Bodi White, vice chairman  
Senator Regina Barrow

#### NON-LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mark Harrell  
Chris Knotts  
David Peterson  
Brenda Zeringue

#### NON-LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Doug Carlson  
Phillip Fetterman  
Jerry Passman  
Brandon Rogillio  
Paul Sawyer  
Tom Stephens  
Larry Thomas  
Eddie Williams

#### **STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Jennifer Winkler, House legislative analyst  
Ashley Davillier, House committee administrative assistant

#### **ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES PRESENT:**

Daniel Leming, House sergeant at arms  
Anthony Lumbard, Senate sergeant at arms

### III. OPENING REMARKS

Representative Hodges gave a brief overview on the history of the Comite River Diversion Canal Project and thanked the attendees for their continued diligence to finishing the project. She expressed how imperative it is to finish the Comite River Diversion Canal project. She spoke about the list of projects that were recommended by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the 1980's, which included the Darlington Reservoir, the Comite River Diversion Canal, East Baton Rouge Flood Control, and the Amite River Ecosystem Restoration. She then informed the committee about HCR 290 that is a resolution urging DOTD or the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to study the completion of the more inexpensive options that were recommended by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that will help to assist in alleviating flooding in the area. She thanked Paul Sawyer and Congressman Garret Graves for their knowledge and commitment to getting funding for the projects.

### IV. DISCUSSION

#### **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) Presentation**

Representative Robby Carter asked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers if the Darlington Reservoir would be revisited because constituents in his area were worried about having to relocate. Nick Sims, USACE, 7400 Leake Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70180, spoke for information only and stated that as of now the Darlington Reservoir was not a project that the Corps was actively working on but they are still evaluating the alternatives per Representative Hodges' resolution requests.

Bobby Duplantier, USACE, 7400 Leake Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70118, spoke for information only and presented a part of the presentation, Exhibit A, which is included in the committee records, to update the committee on the project. He explained how the USACE will deliver nineteen construction contracts and that DOTD has done more than they were required by delivering three construction contracts, which the department will update the committee on later in the meeting. Mr. Duplantier stated that the price for the project had increased since the last committee meeting that was held on March 21, 2023. Due to inflation the project increased to \$907.8M, which is an additional \$476M required to complete the project. He added that the increase in funding was approved and is not a current problem.

Representative Hodges asked the USACE if the contractors who have completed their contract obligations can pick up another contract and begin working on another segment of the project. Mr. Sims answered and stated that companies are eligible to do so but explained that there is a bid process that contractors have to go through and the lowest bidder is awarded the project.

Representative Hodges stressed to the members and the public the importance in realizing that the Comite River Diversion Canal project is one of the largest projects in the Nation. She emphasized

that the work is being done and that the project will be completed.

Mr. Duplantier showed the committee a schedule of the remaining contracts, which showed that there were six construction contracts that still needed to be awarded and predicted that to potentially run into the third-quarter of 2025. Representative Hodges asked if it were possible to cut that time line down, to which Mr. Sims answered by stating that the schedule is realistic and the USACE were not comfortable giving exact dates at the moment but will do their best to be ahead of the predicted schedule.

Representative Mincey asked a series of questions about rain delays and if they were factored into the predicted schedule. Mr. Duplantier stated that in the last year there were less weather days but when the state did have those days it was very harsh and heavy rain which would put the work on hold.

Representative Robby Carter asked the USACE a series of questions. He asked if the federal government was going to fund 100% of the project cost and who was going to fund the maintenance. Mr. Sims answered that the federal government will be funding the entire project but that the state will have to fund the maintenance through DOTD. Representative Robby Carter asked if there was an estimated yearly cost for the maintenance to which Mr. Sims responded that he does not currently have that number. Representative Robby Carter also asked how long it would take to deploy the gates in the event of a flood. Mr. Duplantier answered that the gates will not have to be deployed manually. He explained they are gravity fed and the gates will open once the water reaches a certain touch point to eliminate human or mechanical error. Representative Robby Carter asked if the building and completion of the Comite River Diversion Canal will have any effect on flood insurance costs. Mr. Duplantier stated that he cannot speak for FEMA but there will be a change in homeowner's flood insurance rates. He said he could not speak on the magnitude of the changes or whether the rates will increase or decrease.

Christina Brignac, LA DOTD, 1201 Capitol Access Road, Baton Rouge LA 70802, spoke for information only and presented a part of the presentation, Exhibit A, that was referenced earlier. She gave the committee an update with the three construction contracts that DOTD will be delivering.

Representative Hodges asked Ms. Brignac about Florida Gas and an alternative design that would allow construction on certain projects while waiting on the first project segment to be completed. Ms. Brignac informed Representative Hodges that they did go with this plan and Channel Segment 3 is an example of a separate project that is being worked on in the meantime.

Representative Mincey asked Ms. Brignac a few questions about the Construction Management at Risk (CMAR) method used for project segments. Ms. Brignac explained to Representative Mincey that CMAR was used to fund two segments, LA-19 and LA-67, and for LA-964 they went the traditional way because LA-964 was already designed when DOTD took on the Comite River Diversion Canal Project, whereas LA-19 and LA-67 were not. Representative Mincey asked what

benefits to the schedule have they seen by using CMAR. Ms. Brignac answered that one of the major benefits is that the contractors are there from the beginning to assist with designs and to help make better economic decisions in comparison to the traditional way.

Representative Hodges asked the USACE for updates on Brooks Lake and the diversion structure, to which Mr. Duplantier referred back to the schedule to show the committee that Brooks Lake is 65% through the design stage with an estimated completion time in the second-quarter of 2024. Mr. Sims referred back to the schedule to show the committee that the diversion structure was also in the design review stages of the process with an estimated completion time in the first to third quarter of 2024.

Representative Hodges thanked the USACE and DOTD for providing the committee with updates and for their hard work.

### **Livingston Parish Update from Mark Harrell**

Mark Harrell, no witness card provided, gave the committee an update on the drainage projects completed in Livingston Parish with NRCS Funding pre and post Hurricane Ida, and presented maps to show the committee, Exhibit B, which are included in the committee records. He also updated the committee on a few dredging efforts that are being done in Livingston Parish that accumulated into about 93 miles of clearing and dredging.

Representative Hodges thanked Mr. Harrell for the update and for his efforts in contributing to factors that will help mitigate flooding.

Representative Mincey asked Mark Harrell to send copies of the map exhibits to the committee for their reference.

### **EBR Parish - Update on Flood Control**

Fred Raiford, East Baton Rouge Parish, no address provided, spoke in support. He explained the benefits of spending funding on dredging and the impact it will have on East Baton Rouge, Livingston, and Ascension parishes. He explained that funding or lack thereof is always one of the main concerns when it comes to clearing and snagging. He emphasized that he is willing to work with all the parishes to make sure that dredging efforts are being done so that the problem isn't pushed from one area to the next.

Representative Hodges thanks Mr. Raiford for his time, efforts and for seeing the overall purpose in these projects.

Representative Mincey emphasized that working together across agencies is what will continue to push these projects in the right direction.

Representative Hodges requested Major Colin Westlake to come to the witness table.

Major Colin Westlake, USACE, 7400 Leake Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70160, and spoke for information only. Representative Hodges asked Major Westlake if after hearing the conversations today if there was anything that can be done to see the Comite River Diversion Canal project finished at a faster rate. Major Westlake stated that direct and early communication from representatives to the USACE is the best way to get projects done.

### **Five-S Group**

Paul Henderson, no witness card provided, provided a Handout entitled, "Unsolicited Proposal Stone Supply For Comite River Diversion Canal", Exhibit C, which is included in the committee records. He proposed using Stone Supply for the Comite River Diversion Canal to improve the schedule and help lower the cost of the project.

Representatives Robby Carter, Hodges and Mincey, asked a series of questions regarding Mr. Henderson's proposal to see if he has attempted to reach out to the USACE or DOTD in order to work on the project and the specifics of the rocks to which Mr. Henderson responded.

## **V. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Robert Burns, Concerned Citizens for Drainage Improvement, no address provided, spoke for information only and expressed his disappointment in the progression of the Comite River Diversion Canal project as each meeting seems to be redundant and full of deadlines and completion dates being pushed back.

Noel Hunt, Concerned Citizens for Drainage Improvement, 10090 Comite Drive, Central City, LA 70714, spoke in support of the Comite River Diversion Canal project and expressed his appreciation to the committee for keeping this project moving.

Kellee Hennessy Dickerson, District 64, 35104 Perkins Road, Denham Springs, LA 70706, spoke in support of the Comite River Diversion Canal project. She expressed the need for the contractors to push to try to expedite project completion.

## **VI. OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

## **VII. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

**VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairwoman Valarie Hodges  
Comite River Diversion Canal Project Task Force

Date approved: \_\_\_\_\_