



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
NEW ORLEANS DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
P.O. BOX 60267
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA 70160

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF:

AUG 02 1985

Planning Division
Environmental Analysis Branch

Honorable Billy Tauzin
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Tauzin:

Reference your letter of June 17, 1985, and our partial response dated July 12, 1985, concerning the Mississippi-River Gulf Outlet (MR-GO) project and the Lake Pontchartrain and Vicinity Hurricane Protection project.

As you are aware, the District has been proceeding on the development of a mitigation plan to offset the environmental losses associated with the Lake Pontchartrain and Vicinity Hurricane Protection project. As part of that planning process, we investigated a number of mitigative measures in various geographic locations. Initial investigations included a plan in the Lake Lery area of St. Bernard Parish. At the request of St. Bernard Parish in the enclosed letter dated February 13, 1985, two other management areas were investigated to the exclusion of the Lake Lery area. We have worked closely with St. Bernard Parish and all other local assurers in our attempt to develop adequate mitigation measures acceptable to all parties.

The three plans which we are now investigating do not include St. Bernard Parish. The reason St. Bernard Parish is not included in our latest array is discussed briefly in our "Announcement of Public Meeting" provided in our July 12, 1985, correspondence. An ideal mitigation plan would include mitigation in the area of impact in the same proportions as damages. For example, since 51 percent of the environmental damages occurred in St. Bernard Parish, an ideal plan would mitigate in that parish for 51 percent of the total project losses and represent 51 percent of the total mitigation cost. Accomplishing such an ideal plan for St. Bernard, Jefferson, St. Charles, and Orleans Parishes can be appreciated as a most difficult task. Consequently, we are now concentrating our planning efforts on plans which would mitigate 100 percent of the project damages and do so in an economical manner. We are required by law to share the cost on a 70 percent Federal/30 percent non-Federal basis. The manner in which the non-Federal share of the 30 percent is allocated to the various local assurers is a matter that those agencies must determine for themselves. Several methods would appear to be reasonable including your suggestion that each assurer should share the costs on the basis of the

benefits received from the mitigation plan. Another option would be for the four assurers to share the 30 percent local costs on an equal basis irrespective of the final mitigation plan. There are undoubtedly other methods of allocating the 30 percent share which could be investigated. Once a final mitigation plan is chosen we will look to the local assurers to apportion the costs as they see fit. Please note on the enclosed letter dated March 22, 1985, St. Bernard Parish advised of their continued objection to local financial participation and maintenance. In summary, we have developed the best plans we could in accordance with the planning guidance and policies which dictate our plan formulation and held a public meeting to solicit input to help us arrive at a final recommendation. With all of the complexities involved, arriving at an equitable mitigation plan is quite a challenge to this District.

The MR-GO project was authorized by Congress in 1956, and the channel feature was constructed between 1961 and 1965, prior to the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. At the time of channel construction, environmental impacts and the consequences of those impacts were not well known. This period preceded the era of environmental awareness. During coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1959, neither the Corps nor the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service considered mitigation for fish and wildlife losses as a project feature. The project itself was authorized prior to the passage of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1958.

We acknowledge that the MR-GO has contributed to erosion in St. Bernard Parish particularly along the banks of the channel. However, land loss is also attributed to natural erosion (especially during hurricanes), subsidence, and the construction of channels for oil and gas exploration. Since abandonment of the St. Bernard Delta by the Mississippi River, the natural processes of deterioration have become dominate in the area. The magnitude of the MR-GO contribution to erosion in the area is not known because of the many factors involved.

The Corps has authority to study the Louisiana coastal erosion problems under the Louisiana Coastal Area study. That study was authorized by a resolution of the Committees on Public Works of the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives passed in 1967. However, the erosion problems specific to the MR-GO were considered by us to be more appropriately addressed by a separate resolution.

Authority was granted by a resolution sponsored by Representative Bob Livingston and adopted by the Committee on Public Works and Transportation of the U.S. House of Representatives on September 23, 1983, to specifically address erosion along the MR-GO.

We intend to study the erosion problems under the latter resolution to determine if any modifications to the existing project are advisable and to determine the feasibility of bank protection measures.

As Fiscal Year 1986 funds are again limited and are being allocated to other priority studies, funds are not available to initiate the MR-CO, St. Bernard Parish (Bank Erosion) study. The Fiscal Year 1987 budget is presently being formulated, and this study along with many other worthy studies, will be considered.

If I can be of any further assistance, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Eugene S. Witherapoon
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
District Engineer

Enclosures

Copies Furnished: w basic
CDR USACE (DAEN-CWZ-F)(DAEN-CWP)
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