COUNCIL ON WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2020

*Time: 1:30 pm*

*Zoom Meeting*

1. **Call to Order**

**Led by Council Chairman – Bren Haase, CPRA**

1. **Roll Call**

**Led by Council Secretary – Lori Dupont, OCD**

Bren Haase (CPRA)

Chris Knotts (DOTD)

Randy Meyers (LDWF)

James Waskom (GOHSEP)

Patrick Forbes (OCD)

5 members present, we do have a quorum.

1. **Pledge of Allegiance**

**Led by Council Chairman Bren Haase, CPRA**

1. **Public Comment**

No public comment at this time.

1. **Consent Agenda Items**

Council Chairman Bren Haase asked to approve July 30/August 4 council meeting minutes.

**Motion: James Waskom motions to approve the July 30/August 4, 2020 council meeting minutes**

**Second: Patrick Forbes**

**Yeas: 5 Nays: 0 Absent: N/A**

Approved with no objections.

Council Chairman Bren Haase stated that there were some concerns related to the deadline to submit Round 1 full applications and asked for a motion to amend the agenda to consider extending the deadline one month.

Motion: Patrick Forbes motioned to amend the agenda to act on extending the Round 1 full application deadline.

Second: James Waskom

Yeas: 5 Nays: 0 Absent: N/A

Approved with no objections.

Council Chairman Bren Haase asked for a motion to extend the Round 1 full application deadline.

Motion: Patrick Forbes

Second: Chris Knotts

Yeas: 5 Nays: 0 Absent: N/A

Approved with no objections.

Alex Carter, OCD – The specific date/deadline will be set after the meeting. Will update the Policies and Procedures, website and send an eblast specific to eligible Round 1 applicants.

1. **Opening Remarks**

**Council Chairman, Bren Haase, CPRA**

Thanked everyone for joining the meeting of the Council on Watershed Management. Provided a brief overview of the Louisiana Watershed Initiative.

1. **Updates**
	1. **CDBG-MIT Funding Availability**

Patrick Forbes, OCD

* State of Louisiana and HUD have signed the grant agreement.
* $1.2 Billion is now available to the state in support of mitigation activities & this effort.
* Dollars will be spent according to the action plan approved by HUD in February of this year.
* Grant funds must be used to support mitigation activities and further the state’s action plan.
* Further discussion during this meeting on how the state has already begun putting these dollars to work.
	1. **Local & Regional Watershed Projects and Programs – Round 1**

**Billy Williamson, DOTD**

* Funding is for low-risk, high-impact projects that mitigate flood risk and incentivize prioritization of projects through regional collaboration.
* Program began accepting full applications from eligible applicants on Sept. 18 through their online grant agreement account.
* Additional Technical Assistance for completing full applications available through a voluntary webinar on December 3. An eblast with a registration link will be sent out shortly.
* Keep in mind that this is a competitive grant process, which limits the information and advice that can be provided to ensure this process is fair, transparent and competitive.
* The state will be scoring all applications to ensure the best projects are chosen, so please manage expectations regarding the timeline of project awards.
	1. **Nonfederal Cost Share Program**

**Sean Wyatt, GOHSEP**

* GOHSEP and OCD have continued to coordinate.
* Projects have been identified and applicants notified.
* Program will dispense nearly $97M in CDBG-MIT funds.

**D. State Agency Projects and Programs**

**Kay LeSage, OCD**

* State agencies have worked together to program additional project and program dollars to immediately advance awards that enhance resilience and align with our agency missions and the mission of the Watershed Initiative.
* Very diverse portfolio of projects across the state that reduce flood risk, store waters to enhance natural habitats, and move people out of harm’s way that are subject to severe flood risk.
* Ensure you are subscribed to the LWI mailing list at watershed.la.gov and contact Kristen Vidrine if you have any questions at Kristen.vidrine@la.gov.

**E. Regional Capacity Building Grant Program**

**Nicolette Jones, OCD**

**Alex Carter, OCD**

* Brief overview of the program’s goals and objectives.
* Working side-by-side with all eight regions to help them make well-informed recommendations on long-term regional governance.
* Offered optional webinar to help keep the regions informed of progress and considerations from other states that have undergone similar processes and can offer lessons learned.
* The LWI generated research on each region’s entities and provided evaluation exercises. After the exercises, many of the regions will begin to shift into ‘how’ entities best suited to perform the regional work long-term, including provisional recommendations on coalition structure and action items for implementation.
* Due to the many challenges with meetings, COVID and storm over the past several months, we have built into the revised program timeline some time for each of the regions to coordinate with their parish leadership, attorneys and stakeholder groups to explain this process and their recommendations.
* A lot of the program elements will come together in May and June of 2021.
* Gave an overview and update on where we are in the regional exercise across the state with the steering committees.
* Provided a snapshot of the regional watershed management webinar from Oct. 14 that was held in collaboration with LSU and Region 7 to help steering committee members prep of governance exercises.
* Described the tools in play being utilized to:
	+ Connect root causes with the functions, authorities and entities best suited for the work
	+ Summary of potential solutions
	+ Coalition options and trade-offs
	+ Regional project inventories
* Regional Capacity Building Grant Program Next Steps
	+ Refining the exercise outcomes across the state
	+ Completing Exercises 2 and 3
	+ Coordinate a Watershed Coordinators meeting in December
	+ Assist the regions in preparing to make recommendations for a coalition structure and creating that roadmap for implementation

**F. Update on Operational Guidance**

**Justin Kozak, CPEX**

* Overview on why the Operational Guidance was developed.
* Completion of a final draft of the feedback received from on-going agency meetings, with delivery during the December All TAG meeting where we will highlight how any issues raised were addressed and a final discussion with the Working Group to ensure each respective agency is in support of the document. Once adopted, we will shift into enacting changes recommended.
* Moving forward, agency members will continue to provide feedback on the Operational Guidance implementation, and the Working Group should anticipate work needs with the goal of the Council being ready to approve the document in January 2021.

**G. Watershed Mapping, Monitoring and Modeling Program**

**Ian Trahan, DOTD**

* Provided recap and summary of ongoing activities:
	+ Developing H&H statewide modeling; expected to be completed within 24-36 months
	+ Notices to Proceed for Task Order 1 have been issued for each HUC8 watershed across the state
	+ Executed a Memorandum of Understanding with both the New Orleans and Vicksburg offices of the Army Corps of Engineers to elevate and recognize this partnership between USACE and LWI

**Sam Martin, CPRA**

* Overview of the effort led by The Water Institute of the Gulf to assess and determine the path forward that best aligns modeling efforts in the state’s coastal areas with the LWI models, with a focus on the lower Amite River and Lake Maurepas watersheds.
* Assessment expected to be complete in 2021 and includes two main tasks:
	+ Numerical Models
	+ Probabilistic Analysis

**Ehab Meselhe, Tulane**

* Overview of model storage, use and maintenance.
* ULL & Tulane are performing research necessary to develop a plan and recommendations on long-term model use, storage and maintenance detailing
	+ Needs of the LWI stakeholders
	+ How the LWI model storage & management systems should be designed & implemented
	+ Recommended system architecture and high-level implementation principles
* Anticipate reporting finding from this research in early 2021

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1. **Action Items**
	1. **Precipitation Frequency Estimates for Louisiana (Atlas14)**

Emad Habib, UL

* Overview of Atlas14 (created by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association to provide rigorously analyzed Precipitation Frequency Estimates (PFEs) for the state of Louisiana and our neighbors on the lower Mississippi.

Ian Trahan, DOTD

* Current Atlas14 was updated in 2013 and only used gauge data from before 2010
* Explained why updating Atlas14 are important and extremely valuable:
	+ Produce updated PFEs
	+ Ensure all projects are evaluated using standards that better represent rainfall frequencies over LA
	+ Ensure that detention ponds, roads and subdivisions are designed with standards that reflect updated extreme rainfall conditions and provide the level of protection we expect

Alex Carter, OCD

* Explained how to request an update on Atlas14

Ian Trahan, DOTD

Request a motion from the Council to forward a collective letter of support to the Governor’s Office for review, prior to sending to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to solicit an update of the Point Precipitation Frequency Estimates for the state of Louisiana

Council Chairman Bren Haase

Are there any comments or questions from the Council? Public Comments? Keeping in mind that if approved the LWI agencies will submit the draft letter of request for the Federal Highway Administration to the Governor’s Office for review, with the expectation that we will sign and send to the FHA in December 2020 or early January 2021. The entire process can take two to three years, ideally concluding alongside the modeling effort to enhance assessment of project proposals. This update will help ensure all future projects are evaluated using standards that better represent rainfall frequencies over LA.

Do I hear a motion for the Council to send the draft letter of support to the Governor’s Office prior to soliciting an update of the Point Precipitation Frequency Estimates for the state of Louisiana?

Motion: Chris Knotts

Second: Patrick Forbes

Yeas: 5 Nays: 0 Absent: N/A

Approved with no objections.

B. River and Rainn Gauge Network Design

Emad Habib, UL Lafayette

* Overview of the objectives of the LWI River & Rain Gauge Network
* Explained the Network Design Methodology for selecting the gauges
* Development of ranking criteria to prioritize which gauges would be installed
* Network Design Results identified the top 100 gauges needed within our network, as well as an additional 23 for contingency
* Proposed methodology and results were reviewed by USGS, NWS, the LWI Technical Design and Quality team, and the D&M TAG members from the LWI agencies
* Final locations of LWI 100 gauges by region
* Explained the timeline moving forward with implementation – roughly 30 gauges each year for the next three years – all 100 gauges installed by the end of 2023,

Alex Carter, OCD

The working group requests a motion to approve the phased implementation of the river and rain gauge network, which reflects the outputs of the analysis outlined in the River and Rain Gauge Network Design report. If approved, gauge placement activities would begin January 2021. Investments include a statewide river and rain gauge network to monitor water levels, flow rates, and rainfall in Louisiana watersheds. This would support the collaboration of the LWI models and inform watershed management.

Council Chairman Bren Haase

Any questions or comments from the Council? Public Comment?

Do I hear a motion to approve the phased implementation of the river and rain gauge network which reflects the outputs of the analysis outlined in the River and Rain Gauge Network Design report?

Motion: James Waskom

Second: Patrick Forbes

Yeas: 5 Nays: 0 Absent: N/A

Approved with no objections.

C. Anticipated Program Activities

Patrick Forbes, OCD

* Coordination of OCD and GOHSEP to award dollars for residents both at risk of flooding and recovering from recent storms
* Pushing to award an additional $50-80M by year-end 2021 by prioritizing additional non-structural projects (home elevations and buyout applications)

James Waskom, GOHSEP

* Mitigation dollars are to ensure we build back more resilient
* Not repeat history
* Position residents to get the resources and information they need to make informed choices

Alex Carter, OCD

If approved, we would work to reorganize some program elements to more immediately prioritize the development of LWI non-structural programs. This will provide support for Louisiana communities with immediate flood risk reduction needs and incorporate best mitigation practices into their recovery process.

Council Chairman Bren Haase

Any questions or comments from the Council? Public Comment?

Do I hear a motion to approve the prioritization of nonstructural programs for homeowners at a high risk statewide and within areas recently impacted by storms?

Motion: James Waskom

Second: Patrick Forbes

Yeas: 5 Nays: 0 Absent: N/A

Approved with no objections.

D. Future Council on Watershed Management Meeting Date

Council Chairman Bren Haase

Unless any conflicts are identified at this time, the council will plan to reconvene in March 2021.

Hearing none, the next meeting date is confirmed.

We look forward to seeing you all in the new year.

Any public comments before we move on to closing remarks?

X. Closing Remarks
Council Chairman Bren Haase

Thanked everyone. First meeting as Chair and is honored to be working with such an elite group of representatives, personnel, stakeholders, and exerts in this novel process to improve the way that we deal with flood risk mitigation in the state of Louisiana.

XI. Adjournment
Motion: Chris Knotts

Second: James Waskom

Yeas: 5 Nays: 0 Absent: N/A

Adjournment at 3:04 p.m.