



LaNERR Site Development Committee

Meeting #5

Thursday, May 13, 2021 (10:00 am – 12:00 pm)

Attendees

SDC Members - Abigail Bockus, LUMCON; Carol Wilson, LSU; Chip McGimsey, CRT; Craig Colten, LSU; Honora Buras, CPRA; Jill Trepanier, LSU; Justin Lemoine, CRT; Pat Arnould, GOIA; Sara Krupa, LDNR; Seth Blitch, TNC; Tracy Quirk, LSU; Kevin Ringelman, LSU; John Nyman, LSU; James Nelson, ULL; Kyle Piller, SELU; Greg Steyer, USGS; David Muth, NWF; Jennifer Hill, Louisiana Tech; Brian Roberts, LUMCON; Gina Campo, OCD; Julie Whitbeck, NPS; Robert Thomas, Loyola; Dinah Maygarden, UNO; Kacie Wright, USGS; Robert Moreau, SELU; Kristi Trail, PC; David Podgorski, UNO; Kenny Ribbeck, LDWF; Patty Ferguson Bohnee, ASU; Ron Boustany, NRCS; Brian Gautreau, LSU AgCenter; Mark Tobler, Loyola; Ken Krauss, USGS; Quenton Fontenot, NSU; Cindy Brown, LTL; Cheston Hill, OSL; Gary Shaffer, SELU

Other Attendees: Eva Hillman, PC; Marty Floyd, Louisiana Wildlife Federation; Amy Dixon, USACE; Caroline Byrne, Atchafalaya National Heritage Area; Deborah Dardis, SELU; Glenn Constant, USFWS; Amy Lesen, Dillard University; Dominique Seibert, LA Sea Grant; Daniel Breaux, USFWS; Phil Bucolo, Loyola; *JFortun (unsure who this is; name and affiliation were not provided in the chat)*

Designation Leadership Team: Robert Twilley, LA Sea Grant; LaTosha Mullins, LA Sea Grant; Morgan Crutcher, GOCA (unable to attend); Kristin Ransom, NOAA

Royal Engineers & Consultants (LA Sea Grant Support): Mandy Green, Kirk Rhinehart and Alaina Grace (unable to attend)

SDC Members Unable to Attend: Aimee Hollander, NSU; Andy Dolan, USFWS; Bryan Piazza, TNC; Emad Habib, ULL; John Tirpak, USFWS; Mark Kulp, UNO; Megan La Peyre, USGS; Mitchell Aleshire, CRT; Morgan Kelly, LSU; Shirell Parfait-Dardar, GCDBCC; Natalie Snider, EDF; Gary Lafleur, NSU; Giovanna McClenachan, NSU; Liz Skilton, ULL; Chuck Hunter, USFWS; Illya Tietzel, UNO; Jonathan Foret, SLWDC; Malay Ghose Hajra, UNO; Simone Maloz, RoR; Joey Breaux, LDAF; Heather Stone, ULL; Andy Fischer, LDWF; Martin O'Connell, UNO; Matthew Hiatt, LSU; Nathan Corley, LDOE; Navid Jafari, LSU; Robert Mahon, UNO; Scott Hemmerling, WI; Thomas Gresham, LDOE; Beth Stauffer, ULL; Danielle Keller, USACE; Erik Johnson, Audubon; Michael Pasquier, LSU; Alex Kolker, LUMCON; Claire Anderson, Ripple Effect; Dean Blanchard, BTNEP; Erin Cox, UNO; Maida Owens, CRT; Mike Carloss, DU; Corey Miller, CRCL; Rebecca Triche, LWF; Mark Davis, Tulane; Donata Henry, Tulane



Summary

Welcome

The key objectives of the meeting were to discuss Phase I proposals, the 2nd draft of Site Selection Criteria, and Phase II and Final Candidate Site proposal guidance. Site Development Committee website content was reviewed.

Phase I Proposal Presentations

Presentations were provided by proposal team leads/co-leads for each of the three estuarine zones.

Pontchartrain Estuarine Zone

Kristi Trail provided an overview of the Phase I Pontchartrain proposal, which included a map of the Pontchartrain Basin as well as a list of personnel, participating institutions, areas of expertise and team roles. The team leads reached out to academic institutions to ensure geographic coverage across the basin as well as broad expertise.

The Pontchartrain proposal team has a five member leadership team named the Pontchartrain Proposal Leadership Team (PPLT). Each institution represented on the PPLT has its own sub-team. The PPLT helps keep the team organized and ensures regular email communication. Team documents have been uploaded to the SharePoint site provided by the DLT, but the team is also using Google Drive.

The team identified the following needs: GIS shapefiles for all previously provided SDC maps; a SharePoint site; a list of any other shared state/federal agency personnel who will be on all teams; a zoom call with the North Carolina NERR to discuss pros/cons of multi-component NERR; and guidance from DLT/NOAA on a multi-component site.

Eva Hillman from PC/SELU reviewed the proposed core and buffer area maps. The proposed site will be multi-component and spans from the Maurepas and Manchac Swamps to the Chandeleur Islands (seagrasses) and includes Big Branch National Wildlife Refuge, the Orleans Land Bridge, and Biloxi Marsh. Total site acreage is approximately 373,000 acres with approximately 251,500 acres of land.

The Pontchartrain proposal team confirmed that they have not yet selected a location for the NERR headquarters or decided on a state partner. The team is open to considering other areas for inclusion in their site but realize that their proposed site is already extensive.

Barataria Estuarine Zone

Andy Nyman provided an overview of the Phase I Barataria proposals. The team is proposing two options at this time with the possibility of a third hybrid option. The team member list was shared. One of the strengths of having a Barataria NERR is its proximity to New Orleans. If 1% of tourist that visit New Orleans annually would visit the NERR, number of annual visitors would be close to 20,000. Proximity to the Mid-Barataria Diversion is also reason to focus on Barataria. NERR headquarters are proposed for either Jean Lafitte or West Pointe a la Hache (WPALH).

The Lafitte proposal team is led by Tracy Quirk. State owned lands within the proposed site include Salvador WMA; federal lands include Jean Lafitte National Park; Wisner Foundation property near Grand Isle is also included. For the Lafitte site, formal communication has occurred with Jefferson Parish



government to provide lands for the NERR. Oil spill funding is being used to construct the Lafitte Wetland Education Center, which should be completed in approximately 2 years. The Town of Lafitte is working on waterways to take visitors out directly from the center. Having the education center serve as the NERR headquarters could broaden its reach and focus.

Andy Nyman is leading the WPALH proposal team. Plaquemines Parish Government (PPG) offered 10 acres of property for a NERR headquarters (former LSU AgCenter citrus research station), which is approximately 40 miles from New Orleans. The location of the PPG property would allow development of a boat launch directly into the Mississippi River. The proposed site has close proximity to the WPALH siphon, a ferry, Mardi Gras Pass, and the Mid-Barataria Diversion. The site avoids the higher subsidence rates found in some locations within the Mississippi River Delta.

The Barataria proposal team confirmed that Nicholls State University and the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP) are engaged in proposal development. The team was asked to consider adding areas of floating marsh to the proposed site as well as to seek input from Native American community members. The WPALH site would encompass approximately 50,000 acres of marsh land plus another 100,000 or 200,000 acres of state water bottoms. Acreage would be split between core and buffer. The NPS' Barataria Preserve would add approximately 27,000 acres of predominantly freshwater wetlands, approximately 18,000 acres of marsh (freshwater floatant & some established on mineral substrates) and 9,000 acres of swamp (bald cypress + bottomland hardwood) to either of the proposed Barataria sites.

Atchafalaya Estuarine Zone

Brian Roberts provided an overview of the Phase I Atchafalaya proposal. The Atchafalaya Zone is in close proximity to Lafayette, Baton Rouge, Morgan City, and Thibodaux as well as multiple universities. Brian discussed how the LaNERR would fit into the overall NERR network. A list of team members and their expertise were discussed, and to date, the team has met via a series of zoom meetings. The team is trying to identify a site that provides a unique river delta setting that encompasses all key relevant habitats found in Louisiana. Three distinct zones were identified for the Atchafalaya site: alluvial floodplain, river delta and fresh marsh, and brackish and salt marsh. Maps showing core and buffer areas for each zone were discussed. The buffer area for the alluvial floodplain zone would be the main stem of the Atchafalaya River. Boundaries for each zone could be modified to follow boundaries of state/federal lands more closely (e.g., Marsh Island WMA). There are several interpretative sites throughout the zone that may be available to serve as the headquarters. The team has chosen to focus the NERR on highlighting the ability, within a contained area, to have great diversity of habitats representative of the state of Louisiana. Team needs include assistance in identifying key contacts for resource protection and acquisition and management as well as GIS support.

The Atchafalaya site would include approximately 175,000 acres of core alluvial, 210,000 acres of core marsh, and 268,000 acres of core river delta. Buffer areas are similar in size.

Second Draft Site Selection Criteria

There have been two meetings of the site criteria subcommittee. The DLT plans to submit site selection criteria to NOAA in early June with the goal of having it approved by NOAA in early July. Proposal teams would then have the final site selection criteria while they are working on Final Phase proposals.



The second draft of the site criteria was provided as a send-ahead for SDC Meeting #5 and was briefly discussed during the meeting. Longleaf pine savanna was confirmed to be included as part of the upland land class. SDC members were asked to provide feedback on the second draft site selection criteria; feedback will be considered at the next working meeting of the site criteria subcommittee.

Phase II and Final Candidate Site Proposal Guidance

Phase II and Final Candidate Site Proposal Guidance was discussed. Phase II proposals are due 6/30/21, and Final Phase Proposals are due 9/24/21. One key modification to previously discussed guidance was that the team providing GIS Support would like to provide a standard set of maps to each team rather than the GIS data underlying maps previously produced for the SDC. The GIS team has proposed to provide a total of six maps for each team (4 standard maps and 2 maps based on specific proposal team requests). Map requests should be provided to the GIS team via email to deltanerr@lsu.edu by 6/1/21.

Wrap Up and Next Steps

The revised LaNERR timeline was discussed. The DLT is scheduling the next site criteria committee meeting and a 'check in' meeting with proposal teams. Organization of the screening subcommittee is a high priority, and the DLT will be scheduling the first subcommittee meeting in early June. SDC Meeting #6 will be held in late July to discuss Phase II proposals, feedback from the screening subcommittee, and provide any update on Final Phase proposal guidance. Town Hall meetings will be held in August for proposal teams to solicit feedback from the public on their proposals.

The SDC Meeting #5 recording and meeting summary will be posted to the SDC site following the meeting.