



## LaNERR Site Development Committee

### Meeting #6

Wednesday, July 14, 2021 (10:00 – 11:30 am)

#### Attendees

**SDC Members** - Carol Wilson, LSU; Chip McGimsey, CRT; Craig Colten, LSU; Justin Lemoine, CRT; Tracy Quirk, LSU; James Nelson, ULL; David Muth, NWF; Brian Roberts, LUMCON; Julie Whitbeck, NPS; Kacie Wright, USGS; Robert Moreau, SELU; Kristi Trail, PC; David Podgorski, UNO; Patty Ferguson Bohnee, ASU; Mark Tobler, Loyola; Quenton Fontenot, NSU; Cheston Hill, OSL; Natalie Snider, EDF; Giovanna McClenachan, NSU; Chuck Hunter, USFWS; Simone Maloz, RoR; Andy Fischer, LDWF; Martin O'Connell, UNO; Matthew Hiatt, LSU; Nathan Corley, LDOE; Navid Jafari, LSU; Beth Stauffer, ULL; Erik Johnson, Audubon; Claire Anderson, Ripple Effect; Dean Blanchard, BTNEP; Mark Davis, Tulane; Amy Dixon, (formerly) USACE;

**Screening Subcommittee:** Seth Blich, TNC; Alisha Renfro, NWF; Scott Hemmerling, WI; Ron Boustany, NRCS; Rebecca Triche, LWF; Pat Arnould, GOIA; Mike Carloss, DU; Kenny Ribbeck, LDWF; Glenn Constant, USFWS; Honora Buras, CPRA; (unable to attend: Sara Krupa, LDNR; Greg Steyer, USGS; Gina Campo, OCD); Melissa Baustian, WI; Mead Allison, Tulane; Shirley Laska, UNO; Jenneke Visser, ULL; (unable to attend: Sam Bentley, LSU)

**Other Attendees:** Eva Hillmann, PC; Deborah Dardis, SELU; Teague O'Mara, SELU; Blaise Pezold, The Meraux Foundation; Chris Haines, The Meraux Foundation

**Designation Leadership Team:** Robert Twilley, LSU; Sandy Parfait, LSU; Julie Lively, LA Sea Grant; Kristin Ransom, NOAA; (unable to attend: LaTosha Mullins, LA Sea Grant)

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

**SDC Members Unable to Attend:** Jill Trepanier, LSU; Kevin Ringelman, LSU; John Nyman, LSU; Kyle Piller, SELU; Jennifer Hill, Louisiana Tech; Robert Thomas, Loyola; Dinah Maygarden, UNO; Brian Gautreau, LSU AgCenter; Ken Krauss, USGS; Cindy Brown, LTL; Aimee Hollander, NSU; Andy Dolan, USFWS; Bryan Piazza, TNC; Emad Habib, ULL; Mark Kulp, UNO; Megan La Peyre, USGS; Mitchell Aleshire, CRT; Morgan Kelly, LSU; Shirell Parfait-Dardar, GCDBCC; Gary Lafleur, NSU; Liz Skilton, ULL; Illya Tietzel, UNO; Jonathan Foret, SLWDC; Malay Ghose Hajra, UNO; Joey Breaux, LDAF; Heather Stone, ULL; Robert Mahon, UNO; Thomas Gresham, LDOE; Danielle Keller, USACE; Michael Pasquier, LSU; Alex Kolker, LUMCON; Erin Cox, UNO; Maida Owens, CRT; Corey Miller, CRCL; Donata Henry, Tulane



## Summary

### Welcome

Robert Twilley opened the meeting and noted that the meeting is being recorded for anyone unable to attend. The last meeting of the LaNERR Site Development Committee was May 13, 2021, to discuss Phase I proposals (presentations), the 2nd draft of Site Selection Criteria, and Phase II and Final Candidate Site proposal guidance.

The key objectives of the meeting today are to review the revised LaNERR Workflow and Schedule (dated July 6, 2021), review NOAA feedback on the revised Site Selection Criteria, discuss Phase II proposals (presentations), get updates on the next steps for the Screening Subcommittee, and discuss preparations for Town Halls.

Materials will continue to be provided to the SDC as they are developed. The public facing Sea Grant LaNERR website will also be updated periodically. SDC Meeting #6 materials are available for download, along with previous SDC meeting materials (<https://www.laseagrant.org/deltanerr/committee/>; Password: deltanerr).

### Revised LaNERR Workflow and Schedule

An overview of the file dated July 6, 2021, was presented. The timeline has been expanded to allow for more time to prepare and advertise for the Town Halls as well as more time for proposal teams to incorporate feedback from the Town Halls into their Final Site Proposals. Refer to the revised Workflow and Schedule that is available in the SDC website for specific details.

### NOAA Feedback on Draft Site Selection Criteria

In early July 2021, the DLT received comments from NOAA regarding the modified Site Selection Criteria. NOAA was generally pleased with the modifications that were made and how the DLT and Site Criteria Subcommittee recommended changes specific for Louisiana. A new appendix was added to the NOAA guidance document, which includes additional criteria. From the new appendix, two new criteria categories have been added to the LaNERR Site Selection Criteria, including “ability to accommodate climate change” and “LaNERR Partnerships.” The DLT has made the changes requested by NOAA and will circulate the ‘final’ version to the Site Criteria Subcommittee for feedback before returning the revisions to NOAA for final review. These materials are available on the SDC website.

### Phase II Proposal Presentations

Presentations were given by proposal team leads/co-leads for each of the three estuarine zones. A copy of each Phase II proposal is available on the SDC website. Proposal Teams were asked to submit a copy of their presentation to Robert Twilley so they could be provided to the Screening Subcommittee. The DLT will update the deadline for map requests in the proposal guidance document to reflect the new schedule.



## **Barataria Estuarine Zone**

Tracy Quirk of LSU presented the Phase II Barataria Site Proposal. The presentation included an overview of team members, an overview of their tentative core and buffer areas, and the merits of their candidate site as it relates to NOAA's NERR Site Selection Criteria. She mentioned the importance of the proximity to New Orleans and the number of residents and tourists. She highlighted LDWF, CPRA, and TNC as being important contacts moving forward and gave an overview of land ownership in their draft site boundaries (e.g., over 80,000 acres; 80% state owned). Specifically, they are interested in places such as (but not limited to): Lake Salvador/Timken, Jean Laffite NHP, Barataria Preserve, TNC-owned land, and potentially the Wisner Trust Land (City of NO). There are two options for the headquarters, including the Laffite Wetland Center (under development) or a facility on state-owned lands further south in the basin. She highlighted the array of habitat types included in their candidate site and mentioned several groups and organizations already working to protect the natural resources and habitats in this basin. She spoke of the site's suitability for research, monitoring, and resource protection by highlighting the amount of monitoring currently taking place and the opportunity to capitalize on future monitoring that is anticipated in relation to the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion. She also spoke to the site's suitability for education, interpretation, and training by highlighting several active groups with programs already in place, including (but not limited to): Ripple Effect in New Orleans, JLNHP, Lake Salvador WMA, Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, LA Wetlands Education Center and Ecotourism Ferry to Grand Isle (in development), LUMCON, and the Sea Grant Oyster Lab on Grand Isle. Last, she highlighted their team's opportunities to engage with both private land owners and CPRA. For additional details, refer to the Phase II Barataria Site Proposal that is available on the SDC website.

## **Atchafalaya Estuarine Zone**

Brian Roberts of LUMCON presented the Phase II Atchafalaya Site Proposal. The presentation included a review of team members, and overview of their tentative core and buffer areas, and the merits of their candidate site as it relates to NOAA's NERR Site Selection Criteria. He briefly mentioned "what is a NERR and what it means to have one," to highlight the importance of these reserves and the significance of having one in Louisiana. He highlighted the merit of the Atchafalaya Basin due to its centralized location, accessibility to metropolitan areas such as Lafayette and Baton Rouge, including several major universities. At this phase, their team is proposing a site that would only require use of state-owned lands (very large patches/lands actively being managed primarily by LDWF). A longer term goal would be to work with federal, organizational (NGOs), and private land owners to expand the NERR. Brian highlighted the array of habitat types in the Atchafalaya Basin as well as land areas of current interest (including, but not limited to): Indian Bayou WMA, Attakapas Island WMA, state river bottoms, Atchafalaya Delta WMA, Marsh Island WMA, State Wildlife Refuge (incorrectly labeled as Rainey on maps), as well as state estuarine and offshore water bottoms. He highlighted a number of species, critical and/or threatened and endangered, that reside in or migrate through the Atchafalaya Basin as well as the extensive monitoring already in place for baselines (CRMS sites) and active research currently underway. Last, he highlighted a number of specific reasons why their proposed site is compatible with management issues, including their proposed area containing: the largest intact, active delta in country, the largest remaining stand of coastal cypress forest, priority status for Governor John Bell Edwards, a major flyway for migratory birds, critical habitat for numerous species, nursery habitat for commercially



and recreationally important species, over 20 CWPPRA restoration sites, a critical relief valve for extreme flood events on the river, critical connection points for inland and coastal shipping routes, thriving finfish and shellfish fisheries, and the largest wild caught crawfish harvest in the nation. For additional details, refer to the Phase II Atchafalaya Site Proposal that is available on the SDC website.

### **Pontchartrain Estuarine Zone**

Kristi Trail and Eva Hillman of PC and Rob Moreau of SELU presented the Phase II Pontchartrain Site Proposal. The presentation included the tentative core and buffer areas and the merits of their candidate site as it relates to NOAA's NERR Site Selection Criteria.

Kristi provided an overview of the site, mentioning that the proposed site does not include the entire Basin. She specified that their approach is focused on a multi-component site, with 5 sub-areas. Overall, their team thinks the Pontchartrain Basin is a perfect candidate for a LaNERR site – lots of baseline ecological data, facilities, and large human population focused in the center of basin with easy access points.

Eva Hillman of PC gave an overview of the anticipated core and buffer areas, associated habitats, and species of interest associated with each of their five 'Sub-areas' of interest. The sub-areas include Maurepas and Manchac swamp areas, Big Branch NWR, Orleans Land Bridge, Biloxi Marsh, and Chandeleur Islands.

Rob Moreau of SELU presented an overview of Pontchartrain Basin vegetation maps and tabular summary by habitat type. He highlighted the benefit of this location for a NERR due to its proximity to the Greater New Orleans metro area. He specifically focused on the many access points, existing education/outreach/research/ecotourism facilities, and noted that their team has identified 22 facilities and programs to date.

During the open question period, an SDC member suggested this team also highlight the proximity to Baton Rouge and consider hosting a Town Hall meeting there.

For additional details, refer to the Phase II Pontchartrain Site Proposal that has been provided on the SDC website.

### **Screening Subcommittee**

Robert Twilley noted that Seth Blitch of TNC, former manager of Apalachicola NERR will serve as the chair for this subcommittee. The subcommittee has been formalized (primarily with SDC members and now four people to represent academia). Member names and affiliations were presented. Seth Blitch briefly covered the role of the subcommittee, noting that their primary role in reviewing the Phase II proposals is to provide constructive feedback to help Proposal Teams improve upon their existing proposals as they move toward their Final phase proposals. Seth will organize an upcoming instructional meeting with this subcommittee, and feedback will be provided to the Proposal Teams by the end of July 2021.



## **Town Halls Guidance**

Robert Twilley reiterated the importance of maximizing public participation and the reasoning for postponing the Town Halls from August to September. Guidance has already been provided to Proposal Teams and additional guidance is forthcoming. The most urgent need at this time is for Proposal Teams to provide the suggested number of location(s) for, and dates/times for the September 2021 Town Halls (by July 23, 2021), as well as a list of additional invitees. The DLT will assist with confirming/securing locations for Town Halls once the suggested locations and dates/times are received. The DLT will provide guidance but would like to hear each Proposal Team's thoughts for Town Hall format. The teams were reminded that the Town Halls will need to be both in person but also contain a virtual option to maximize participation. The DLT will host check-in calls with Proposal Teams to answer questions and lend assistance.

## **Wrap Up and Next Steps**

The SDC Meeting #6 recording and a meeting summary will be posted to the SDC site following the meeting. Recording: [https://lsu.zoom.us/rec/share/H7UauaD8n3t-uugc3\\_7n1IAU1k25oOYall3bjmsQcJEHZGppx-hO5VQFUTaoX9Dy.vTNw6gv6MU3U\\_LU6](https://lsu.zoom.us/rec/share/H7UauaD8n3t-uugc3_7n1IAU1k25oOYall3bjmsQcJEHZGppx-hO5VQFUTaoX9Dy.vTNw6gv6MU3U_LU6).

The SDC was reminded that the next meeting will be in November, and the DLT anticipates having feedback from the Town Halls for that meeting.

The DLT will provide the full list of the new NOAA criteria (Appendix 4) to the SDC, provide the revised LaNERR Site Criteria to the Site Criteria Subcommittee, return the revised LaNERR Site Criteria to NOAA, provide additional Town Hall Guidance to Proposal Teams, and update the proposal guidance document to reflect the new deadline for map requests for Final phase proposals.

Proposal Teams will provide a PDF copy of their Phase II proposal presentation so they can be shared with the Screening Subcommittee. Teams will also provide the suggested number of, location(s) for, and dates/times for the September 2021 Town Halls, as well as a list of additional invitees.

Seth Blitch will schedule a Phase II Proposal Review (instructional) meeting in July with the Screening Subcommittee and ensure feedback is provided to Proposal Teams by the end of July.