



May 5, 2025

The Honorable Jeff Landry  
Office of the Governor  
PO Box 94004  
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

RE: State of Louisiana's Financial Support for Restoration, Enhancement, and Protection of White Lake Conservation Area

Dear Governor Landry,

We, the undersigned organizations, who represent thousands of sportsmen and women and other conservationists and outdoor enthusiasts across the great state of Louisiana, thank you and your Administration for your commitment to conserving and stewarding the natural resources of Louisiana during your tenure as Governor.

During the recent "Conservation Roundtable" hosted by Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF), Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) highlighted how your administration was seeking to direct significant funding to improve White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area (WLWCA) with a variety of funding sources including Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA) and State Surplus funding.

We are grateful that you are making WLWCA a priority for state investment. The need for restoration, enhancement, and protection of WLWCA's natural resources are indeed great. Using state and available federal funds to address coastal erosion, water management, levee maintenance, and habitat enhancement will provide a major investment in southwest Louisiana's efforts to provide stability to the area's diverse habitats, while also equipping LDWF and their staff with the resources they need to effectively manage for abundant waterfowl populations in the future.

#### **White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area**

The WLWCA contains over 71,000 acres and has long been considered one of the most important areas in North America for wintering waterfowl and other migratory shore birds and wading birds. In 2002, the

property was donated to the State of Louisiana by BP America Production Company, which ensured the long-term protection of the property. The area contains approximately 55,000 acres of fresh to intermediate wetlands and approximately 10,500 acres of cropland, with the remaining being made up of uplands, ridges, levees, and access canals and channels.

As you know, WLWCA plays a vital role for wintering waterfowl populations in southwest Louisiana, and is a key hunting destination for waterfowl hunters. Without the infrastructure in place to effectively manage WLWCA, and without the necessary funding to enhance and address critical infrastructure needs, we fear we will lose large swaths of habitat for wintering waterfowl and access for waterfowl hunters. Additionally, it is our belief that public assets (like WLWCA and others) are of much greater importance now than ever before in light of ongoing coastal wetland loss, degradation and the loss of rice production in southwestern Louisiana.

### **Northern White Lake Shoreline Stabilization Project**

The goal of the WLWCA Stabilization Project is to protect 71,000 acres of wetland habitat in Vermilion Parish, Louisiana. The project includes freshwater marsh, agricultural, fallow, and timber habitats on WLWCA. To accomplish this objective, eroding shorelines along the northern bank of White Lake must be stabilized.

The northern bank of White Lake creates 16.3 miles of shoreline on the southern boundary of WLWCA. The shoreline is unprotected from wave action, vessel wake, and high-water events. This fragile freshwater marsh is continuously eroding into the lake. Without this project, flooding, erosion, and significant degradation of the WLWCA marsh will continue. Furthermore, the probability of additional degradation to adjacent tracts of land is likely.

The type of shoreline stabilization that is recommended involves the construction of rock breakwaters parallel to WLWCA's shoreline. These 3 to 4-foot-tall breakwaters would be placed in White Lake approximately 150 feet from the shore, stopping wave action from further eroding WLWCA's shoreline. In addition, dredge material would be deposited behind the breakwaters to aid in marsh accretion.

The technology exists to stabilize the WLWCA shoreline. It has been implemented successfully on over 11 miles of shoreline along the southern border of White Lake. However, significant funding is needed to stabilize over 16 miles of WLWCA shoreline along the northern bank of White Lake.

### **Gulf Intracoastal Waterway Shoreline Stabilization Project**

The Gulf Intracoastal Waterway traverses the WLWCA for approximately 12 miles, which creates approximately 24 miles of shoreline within the area. In order to maintain the hydrologic integrity of the area, spoil banks and a complex network of levees have been used to manage the WLWCA. In 2013, project funding of over \$2,100,000 was used to protect 1.54 miles of GIWW with rock breakwaters. However, twenty-two miles of shoreline remain unprotected - leaving the entire property vulnerable to erosion and bankline breaches during high water events.

Over eighteen miles of the existing GIWW levee system is suffering a high rate of erosion. Storms and flooding have advanced the erosion, and several sections are under immediate threat of failure. Without this project, the threat of flooding and significant degradation of some of the agricultural land and marsh

is likely. If protection is not secured, significant portions of agricultural and marsh land may convert to open lakes due to the current elevation of the property. Many rice fields, cattle pastures, managed marsh habitats, and waterfowl refuges would be exposed to over two feet of standing water throughout the year with floods introducing an additional two feet of water for months at a time. Longterm inundation would drastically alter the habitat and could be disastrous to the waterfowl wintering grounds in the area. Furthermore, the likelihood of additional degradation to adjacent tracts of land is likely without this project.

In closing, we strongly support your commitment to significant funding to address critical needs at WLWCA. We applaud you and your administration for making WLWCA a priority and believe the funding will help protect a critical piece of Louisiana's natural ecosystem while enhancing the ability for LDWF to effectively manage the property for years to come and for all to enjoy. These partners stand ready to work with you on this important project.

Cc:

Secretary Tyler Bosworth

The Honorable Phillip DeVillier, Speaker of the House

The Honorable Cameron Henry, Senate President

The Honorable Robert Hensgens, Chairman Senate Natural Resources Committee

The Honorable Brett F. Geymann, Chairman House Natural Resources and Environment Committee

The Honorable Jack McFarland, Chairman House Committee on Appropriations

Honorable Glenn Womack, Chairman Senate Finance Committee

The Honorable Joseph A. Orgeron, Vice-Chair House Natural Resources and Environment Committee

The Honorable Michael Fesi, Vice Chair Senate Finance Committee

Respectfully,

Jeffrey Wardlaw

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Johnny Marquez

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Mark Lance

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Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

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