



NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Gordon Helm - NOAA Fisheries
(301) 713-2370
Phyllis Darensbourg, Louisiana DNR
(225) 342- 8955

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NOAA FISHERIES AND LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES JOIN TO RESTORE BLACK BAYOU FISH HABITAT

Federal and state officials announced the award of the Black Bayou hydrological restoration project to Luhr Brothers Construction of Alexandria, La. The restoration of Black Bayou is a fisheries habitat project funded through the Breaux Act, a 10-year-old campaign to protect and restore coastal Louisiana's natural resources. The restoration is a joint project of the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA fisheries) and the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Black Bayou is a 25,530-acre wetland located in Cameron and Calcasieu parishes. Bordered by the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW), Sabine Lake and Gum Cove Ridge, the project area was historically a tidally-influenced brackish marsh. This wetland project is intended to restore coastal marsh habitat and to slow the conversion of wetlands to shallow open water.

"The goal for the Black Bayou restoration and our other Breaux Act restoration projects is to protect and restore ecologically valuable areas of coastal Louisiana for the benefit of fisheries, marine habitat and other important resources," said Bill Hogarth, acting assistant administrator. "NOAA fisheries is pleased that restoration activities in Black Bayou are about to begin and we will be able to apply what we're learning here to future projects."

Wave action from boats traveling the GIWW has eroded the bank in five locations along the project boundary. The breaches have allowed salt water into the project area resulting in much of the natural wetland dying back and reverting to shallow open water area. The project will limit saltwater intrusion into the surrounding marsh and canals from the GIWW and Sabine River by re-establishing historic tidal influence through Black Bayou.

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An innovative component of the project will be the replacement of an existing collapsed weir, or dam, with a new weir and the installation of a “self-regulating tide gate”. The self-regulating tide gate, not yet used in Louisiana wetland projects, is expected to aid in restoring natural tidal flushing of the marsh to benefit estuarine plants, fish, shellfish, waterfowl and wildlife.

Louisiana Department of Natural Resources Secretary Jack Caldwell said, “contractors will build a 22,600 foot rock dike on the southern spoil bank of the GIWW with rock weirs across Black Bayou Cutoff Canal, Burton Canal and Block’s Creek. The weirs will have bays between them allowing for tidal exchange, fish passage and boat navigation into Black Bayou.” He said the awarded bid amount of \$2.97 million to Luhr Brothers came in under design-costs estimates.

Caldwell noted that state legislators have strongly supported these coastal efforts and that Reps. Ronnie Johns, Dan Flavin and Sens. Willie Mount and Gerald Theunissen will join DNR project managers in about three weeks to get a firsthand look at the project when construction commences at the site.

The Black Bayou project is expected to protect the existing 25,530 acres of wetlands and over the next two years NOAA fisheries’ plans include planting 55,000 wetland plants. For the 20-year life of the project, an additional 1800 acres of open water is expected to convert back into marsh across the project area.

Breaux Act projects are implemented through agreements between federal project sponsors and DNR. Projects are selected and managed by the Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act Task Force. The Task Force is a partnership among the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Department of Commerce’s NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Department of the Interior’s U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Louisiana Governor’s Office.

NOAA fisheries conducts scientific research and provides services and products to support fisheries management, fisheries development, trade, and industry assistance, enforcement, and protected species and habitat conservation programs. For more information on NOAA’s Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act projects, see <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/>.

For more information on Louisiana Dept. of Natural Resources, visit <http://www.dnr.state.la.us>.