The restoration of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) ecosystem—our natural storm surge buffer—is critical for sustainable communities in Orleans and St. Bernard parishes. Progress made thus far on the MRGO closure and restoration would not be possible without the passion and dedication of local governments, scientists, and community advocates over the last several decades. Public involvement remains critical.

Community members like you have played an essential role in the journey to close the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) and restore the vast ecosystem damaged by the channel. Today, with the Army Corps of Engineers plan for restoration nearly final and the Louisiana Coastal Master Plan moving toward implementation, the community voice is more important than ever.

BACKGROUND

The Army Corps constructed the MRGO in the 1960s. The MRGO is a 76-mile long channel that served as a navigation shortcut from the Gulf of Mexico to the heart of New Orleans. Underused and expensive to maintain, the MRGO impacted over 600,000 acres of coastal ecosystems – completely destroying over 27,000 acres of coastal wetlands that once protected communities in Orleans and St. Bernard parishes from storms.

In 2005, The MRGO showed how vulnerable the MRGO has left us. By destroying the wetlands, the MRGO made Hurricane Katrina more deadly. The levees, exposed to the deep open water of the channel, were decimated. In addition, the MRGO increased storm surge by forming a funnel that focused wind-driven flood waters into the heart of Orleans and St. Bernard parishes.

In 2007, Congress directed the Army Corps to close the channel and plan for restoration of the damages caused by the channel. Although the channel is now closed, restoration remains to be done. In 2012, the State of Louisiana passed its Coastal Master Plan including restoration along the MRGO. Now, we must make sure the plans are implemented and the wetlands along the MRGO are restored.

Above: Dead cypress swamp along the MRGO (left) and healthy cypress swamp in the Barataria Preserve (right)
WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Through consultation with coastal scientists and community leaders, we’ve determined priority projects for restoration. Some of the highlights are:

- Violet Diversion, located in the existing Violet Canal. The majority of marsh creation, marsh nourishment and swamp creation features depend on river reintroduction. The diversion project will allow for salinity control, sediment delivery to the Central Wetlands area and better adaptation to sea-level rise by helping maintain favorable salinity conditions for fish, wildlife, vegetation and living shoreline features.
- Restoration of regional oyster barrier reefs in the Biloxi Marsh
- Restoration of the Central Wetlands Unit, including the Bayou Bienvenue Wetland Triangle
- Restoration of the East Orleans Land Bridge
- Restoration of Bayou la Loutre Ridge

Learn more at www.MRGOmustGO.org

YOUR SUPPORT

Your voice is needed to make sure these projects move forward, gain funding, and restore the MRGO ecosystem.

Visit www.MRGOmustGO.org for more information on MRGO and to send a message to decision-makers. The website will also keep you up-to-date on 2013 hearings and comment periods to speak up for ecosystem restoration.

Contact: National Wildlife Federation, 504-273-4838.