

2019 Regular Session

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 42

BY REPRESENTATIVE ZERINGUE

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

To urge and request the Department of Environmental Quality to study the overall impacts of wetland assimilation projects prior to approval of additional such projects.

WHEREAS, wetland assimilation projects, where treated wastewater is discharged into natural wetlands, are presented as a method to improve and nourish wetlands in a state of deterioration and decay through prevention of the intrusion of saltwater into freshwater habitats while providing nutrients to accelerate growth of vegetation and such projects have the additional benefit of providing a cost-savings to municipalities as they modify their wastewater treatment systems; and

WHEREAS, most of the wetland assimilation projects permitted to date have used waste stabilization ponds that discharge into natural wetland systems, which have been inappropriately deemed equivalent to secondarily treated effluent standards despite not meeting alternative state requirements; and

WHEREAS, although the Department of Environmental Quality has noted that wetland assimilation projects are designed for the assimilation of wastewater effluents, and not for the treatment of effluent, nine of the eleven permitted projects allow for higher discharge of biological oxygen demand (BOD) and total suspended solids (TSS) than for facilities discharging into surface waters; and

WHEREAS, prolonged or excessive nutrient loading may adversely affect the assimilation area, with organic decomposition and loss of root matter contributing to decreasing soil stability and shearing outcomes that are contrary to other efforts engaged in by the state of Louisiana in its coastal protection and restoration efforts; and

WHEREAS, healthy freshwater wetlands benefit from dry periods and seasonal high and low water flow but continuous discharge of municipal wastewater into freshwater marsh

or forested wetlands can cause ponding, reduced plant growth rates, reduced regeneration rates, and undesirable shifts in species composition resulting in loss of wetland values; and

WHEREAS, several organizations active in Louisiana's conservation and coastal protection efforts have expressed concerns about the long-term overall impacts of wetland assimilation projects and the continued approval of such projects without an independent review of the true benefits of such projects and the cumulative impacts of a multitude of such projects, and those organizations have requested an in-depth review of overall long-term benefits of these projects and an independent analysis of current projects that have observable wetland habitat deterioration that may not meet the program's goals to benefit wetlands.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby urge and request the Department of Environmental Quality to study the overall impacts of wetland assimilation projects prior to approval of additional such projects and to provide a comprehensive program evaluation report in consultation with the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, and the Department of Health to the House Committee on Natural Resources and Environment and the Senate Committee on Natural Resources by February 1, 2020.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be forwarded to the secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality.

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE