

2020 First Extraordinary Session

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 24

BY REPRESENTATIVE WHEAT

A RESOLUTION

To urge and request the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority to work with the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to develop integrated coastal protection projects aimed at preserving and maintaining healthy estuarine and essential fish habitat in and around Lake Pontchartrain.

WHEREAS, the Lake Pontchartrain Basin comprises over ten thousand square miles of land in southeast Louisiana and Mississippi; and

WHEREAS, the Lake Pontchartrain Basin is one of the largest estuarine systems in the Gulf of Mexico containing over twenty-two essential habitats and encompassing both rural and urban land use in the most densely populated region in Louisiana, including metro New Orleans and the state capital, Baton Rouge; and

WHEREAS, the Lake Pontchartrain Basin is the heart of the region's commercial and recreational fisheries and the center of southeastern Louisiana's unique cultural heritage, and the estuary's habitats provide important ecological, cultural, and economic benefits to the entire region; and

WHEREAS, estuaries and coastal waters provide an essential habitat for seventy-five percent of America's commercial fish catch and eighty to ninety percent of the recreational fish catch while at the same time, estuaries protect landowners from flood waters and act as storm buffers, guarding residential areas from hurricanes; and

WHEREAS, in 2019 high water in the state's rivers, particularly the Mississippi River, created a situation where the Bonnet Carré Spillway, located on the southwestern edge of Lake Pontchartrain, was open for one hundred twenty-two days diverting large amounts of fresh water into the brackish water of Lake Pontchartrain; and

WHEREAS, the Bonnet Carré Spillway was opened in 2016, 2018, 2019, and again in the spring of 2020, dumping fresh water into Lake Pontchartrain each time and causing extreme damage to the freshwater fisheries of the lake; and

WHEREAS, while acknowledging the necessity of operating the spillway for flood control as it was intended, we must also look at efforts to mitigate the damages done to the estuary and restoring the fisheries impacted by that operation; and

WHEREAS, past efforts to preserve and develop estuarine habitat have included the establishment of rock jetties to protect the shoreline which have the added benefit of harboring small fish and acting as a nursery for many species of fish and the establishment of artificial reefs through deploying reef balls that encourage the biodiversity and environmental quality of the lake through supplementing hard substratum; and

WHEREAS, efforts such as these would be of great benefit to the northwestern areas of the lake, the areas most directly affected by the influx of fresh water into the lake; and

WHEREAS, under the 2019 Fisheries Disaster funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Louisiana has been allocated \$58 million for fisheries recovery, some of which could be used by the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority to improve essential fish habitat in Lake Pontchartrain, particularly in the western portion of the lake which is the portion first affected by the influx of fresh water from the Mississippi River; and

WHEREAS, in addition to the ecological aspects of the Pontchartrain Basin, there has been an increase in human population surrounding the lake which has increased the possibilities of flooding along the lakeshore with a concordant increase in economic impacts from such flooding, some of which could be mitigated through preservation and development of more estuarine habitat; and

WHEREAS, more frequent high water incidents are affecting the quality of life and having negative economic impacts on the residents and businesses located around the lake, impacts that could be mitigated through the implementation of thoughtful, scientifically-based integrated coastal protection projects coordinated between the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority and the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries; and

WHEREAS, Lake Pontchartrain is not frequently thought of in terms of coastal restoration but clearly lies in the coastal zone and is struggling with the same difficulties and

adversity from the same set of factors as the rest of coastal Louisiana in the efforts to preserve and maintain both the ecological health of the area and the protection of the residents and businesses that reside near and benefit from the lake.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Representatives of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby urge and request the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority to work with the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to develop integrated coastal protection projects aimed at preserving and maintaining healthy estuarine and essential fish habitat in and around Lake Pontchartrain.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be forwarded to the chairman of the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority and secretary of the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES