



January 23, 2017

Governor John Bel Edwards
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 94004
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804

Re: Comments on proposed state budget cuts by Representative Lance Harris

Dear Governor Edwards,

The undersigned organizations are writing to ask you to oppose Representative Lance Harris' proposal for state agency budget cuts. In particular, our opposition stems from the noted \$9.3 million in cuts proposed for the Executive Department's budget, which is home to the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA). Since the CPRA is a program which is responsible for a multi-billion dollar implementation program within the Executive Budget, and the funds provided through the Executive Department's budget are critical to managing that program, our concern is simply that the program will be prevented from effectively playing the essential role of restoring and protecting our coast if these cuts are implemented.

Mid-year funding sweeps have continued to diminish the coastal fund, totaling now over \$12 million within the past 3 years alone, including twice during the previous calendar year. These continuing cuts continue to challenge the CPRA by limiting its ability to pay for operating costs, which come directly from their fund and not from the state's general fund like other agencies. This approach is also a practice that we believe should not be continued to fill budget gaps.

Additionally, since the price of oil has fallen dramatically in recent years, minerals revenues from state lands—the only source of recurring state funds to the Coastal Protection and Restoration Trust Fund—have plummeted to an all-time low as recently reported in the DRAFT Fiscal Year **2018 Annual Plan** for Integrated Ecosystem Restoration & Hurricane Protection. These revenues to CPRA for FY 2016 totaled

\$27.6 million and are expected to be half that value, \$14.6 million, for FY2018. The program relies on this revenue to match the Federal Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) program, and to support their operational expenditures.

These factors, in combination, put the coastal program in a precarious position, potentially threatening the ability to perform its duties as prescribed by Louisiana law. And while some may suggest that this program has the money it needs to operate from the BP settlement, the truth is that those BP dollars are used to implement projects to repair the coastal areas, not to support basic staff salaries and overhead costs that are absolutely necessary to manage this work. In addition, cutting already minimal state level contributions to our coastal restoration effort reflects poorly on the State's commitments to its Coastal Master Plan and sends the wrong signal to our federal partners.

Again, we strongly oppose this proposal by Representative Harris, which we believe will have negative and consequential impacts to a program critical to the future of our state and nation.

Sincerely,

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Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana

Keith Ouchley
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The Nature Conservancy, Louisiana

Steve Cochran
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