



**VANISHING
PARADISE**

A program of National Wildlife Federation

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,

Vanishing Paradise is writing to request that you oppose the state budget cut proposed by Representative Lance Harris. Vanishing Paradise is a program that was created to engage sportsmen and women in Louisiana and throughout the Central and Mississippi Flyways, in the fight to restore the Mississippi River Delta as well as the rest of the Gulf Coast. Louisiana is home to five million migratory waterfowl and serves as America's number one recreational fishing destination, generating an annual economic benefit of \$3.1 billion. Vanishing Paradise fully supports the 2017 Coastal Master Plan. We are concerned that the \$9.3 million suggested budget cut proposed by Representative Harris will negatively impact the Executive Department's budget for the state, affecting the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA), the agency responsible for implementing the multi-billion dollar state Coastal Master Plan. CPRA could be hindered in effectively restoring and protecting our coast if said cuts are enacted.

According to the CPRA's Draft Fiscal Year 2018 Annual Plan for Integrated Ecosystem Restoration and Hurricane Protection, the agency is already facing a detrimental budget cut. This plan reflects the hit to the agency's budget from the reduced state mineral revenues generated on state land, due to the dramatic decreases in oil prices over recent years. Unfortunately, this is CPRA's only recurring state funding, and the Draft Fiscal Year 2018 Annual Plan states that revenues have been drastically reduced from \$27.6 million for Fiscal Year 2016 to an expected \$14.6 million for Fiscal Year 2018. 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.

It is evident that further cuts into the CPRA budget may damage the program's commitment to successfully implementing the state's Coastal Master Plan. In the past three years alone, the mid-year

budget cuts have diminished coastal funding by \$12 million. Such cuts have occurred twice in the previous calendar year. And unlike other state agencies that benefit from the state's general fund, the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority relies on their own funding to cover operational costs. Continually cutting from their budget will challenge their ability to operate, and therefore should be discouraged.

Vanishing Paradise is concerned that these cuts may threaten the coastal program's ability to perform its duties as prescribed by Louisiana law. Some may argue that the CPRA will benefit from the BP settlement, however, these dollars will be used to implement projects to repair coastal Louisiana, not to support operating costs and staff salaries, both of which are absolutely necessary in carrying out a project of this level. We believe cutting from the already minimal state level contributions will reflect poorly on our state's commitment to the Coastal Master Plan and send a negative message to our federal partners.

Once again, Vanishing Paradise strongly opposes this proposal by Representative Harris, which we believe will have negative and consequential impacts to a program critical to the future of our "Sportsman's Paradise".

Sincerely,

Steve Bender



Director
Vanishing Paradise Program
National Wildlife Federation