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NRSC-1-2024: IMPLEMENTATION

The Implementation working group investigated the state's functions focused on public infrastructure pertaining to flood protection, restoration, and resiliency. These functions are currently distributed among various agencies, including CPRA, DOTD, and local levee districts or other regional bodies. While CPRA has been successful in managing projects within the coastal zone, its success stems from a well-defined separation of functions—policy, planning, and implementation—that occur without direct consideration of funding. Outside the coastal zone, however, there is no equivalent structure, and resources for large-scale projects are limited. This could be streamlined or made more efficient by developing a single entity to be the non-federal sponsor on federally authorized flood risk reduction projects with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other federal entities, as is done within the coastal zone.

To address this, the Implementation working group recommends evaluating a restructuring of multiple offices and that provide restoration and flood risk reduction public infrastructure into distinct functions statewide. These would mirror the CPRA's model, with clear divisions for policy, planning, and implementation. In theory, the Governor's Office of Coastal Activities (GOCA) would continue the planning and policy role, expanding it to take on a comprehensive approach for the entire state's water and natural resource-related construction projects, functioning as a hub for strategic policy and planning with consideration not to dilute a coastal focus. Therefore, a parallel function to CPRA's planning process for the non-coastal area is necessary, a process separate and apart in mission, with a focus on the non-coastal area, calling the entity Upland Resource Management Authority (URMA), whose mission will focus on non-coastal areas. This function, hereinafter referred to as Upland Planning (UP) will provide strategic direction for non-coastal areas as well as coordinate with CPRA.

This approach would ensure that implementation—handled by CPRA or the newly created URMA—incorporates cohesive management across regions, with clear accountability for both planning and execution.

Planning

As the state's strategic body for water and natural resource management, focused on URMA's mission, UP will become the key driver of strategic oversight and coordination between CPRA and URMA and policy and planning development for URMA. UP will assume responsibility for policy creation, long-term planning, and the evaluation of statewide needs for flood protection, restoration, and resilience outside of the coastal area while CPRA continues its mission within the coastal area. UP's involvement will be layered on top of the existing foundation

of planning in existence at CPRA, to ensure coordination between the missions of the two entities. By building these functions within UP, the state will ensure a consistent, coordinated approach to both coastal and non-coastal water management.

UP will serve as the primary body for assessing statewide water management needs outside of the coastal area and developing comprehensive strategies for coordination between CPRA and URMA. Additionally, UP will work directly with both CPRA and URMA to assess the feasibility and financial implications of proposed projects. Once these evaluations are complete, UP will work with CPRA and URMA on detailed plans for implementation of projects approved and funded by the annual plans of the entities in coordination with UP. This restructuring will ensure that all projects—regardless of location—are rooted in solid planning, with transparent budgeting, and accountability built into the process from the start.

By building these functions, UP will ensure a consistent and coordinated approach between CPRA and URMA on matters of project vetting and funding before implementation begins. This unified planning process will reduce duplication and ensure that CPRA and URMA are working from a shared, clearly defined blueprint with transparent financial boundaries.

CPRA

CPRA will continue as the primary entity responsible for the implementation of coastal projects. However, under this new structure, CPRA's involvement in planning and policy formulation will continue in coordination and collaboration with UP. CPRA's focus will continue to be the development and implementation of projects approved and funded by the authority's annual plan, in coordination with UP. This approach ensures that coastal infrastructure is developed and restored according to well-vetted plans with consideration for the mission of URMA outside of the coastal areas.

The restructuring will allow CPRA to continue to concentrate on the technical and operational aspects of coastal protection, further streamlining the implementation process. However, future funding for CPRA remains a critical concern. As Deepwater Horizon oil spill settlement funds begin to taper, it will be necessary to consider alternative funding sources to ensure CPRA's continued success. Opportunities may exist to utilize funds from the state's natural resources and energy developments, as well as from the Natural Resources Trust Authority (Trust), to address these financial challenges. The NRSC recommends a thorough exploration of funding mechanisms to ensure CPRA's continued success.

URMA

To address the needs of regions outside the coastal area, the NRSC proposes creating the URMA, modeled on CPRA. Currently, the necessary functions to create URMA—such as statewide management of flood risk reduction and water resources infrastructure (i.e. levees,

canals, and flood protection)—are housed within DOTD, isolated from the rest of the state’s natural resources management structure. The formation of URMA would centralize these responsibilities and create a direct counterpart to CPRA, focused on non-coastal flood protection.

This restructuring would ensure better coordination between CPRA and URMA through UP, recognizing that water management issues often span coastal and non-coastal regions. The NRSC recommends a comprehensive review of the functions housed in DOTD’s Public Works Division to facilitate URMA’s creation, as well as an evaluation of other existing governmental entities involved in these efforts, in collaboration with the interested agencies, to establish an effective structure for URMA, ideally with an existing funding source.

Like CPRA, URMA will focus on project design and execution, relying on UP for planning and policy guidance as well as coordination with CPRA. This alignment will ensure that URMA’s projects are rooted in solid, well-coordinated strategies, addressing long-standing concerns raised by residents and leaders about flood protection needs north of the coastal zone.

Funding Considerations

Future funding will be an important consideration for both CPRA and URMA. While UP will address coordination of planning and cost assessments, stable financial support will be necessary for both agencies to execute their projects. The Trust could provide a valuable funding mechanism, ensuring the long-term sustainability of both coastal and non-coastal infrastructure efforts.

The NRSC recommends further research into funding opportunities, including leveraging natural resources and energy developments to secure future financial stability. With proper funding in place, CPRA and URMA will be able to address the infrastructure needs of the state in a coordinated and efficient manner.

Conclusion

This new structure, which pursues project execution from a standpoint of coordinated planning, promises a more efficient approach to managing public infrastructure for flood protection and natural resource management. By building on the successful foundation at CPRA, ensuring coordination through UP, and leaving project development and execution to CPRA and URMA, the state can ensure that all projects are thoroughly vetted, funded, coordinated, and strategically sound before implementation. This system will improve coordination, streamline processes, and make more effective use of state resources to meet infrastructure needs both inside and outside the coastal zone.