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June 17, 1985

Colonel Eugene S. Witherspoon
District Engineer, New Orleans District
U.S. Army Corps Of Engineers
P.O.Box 60627
New Orleans, Louisiana 70160

Dear Colonel Witherspoon:

The Mississippi River Gulf Outlets project and the Lake Pontchartrain Hurricane Protection project are of first importance to the future of New Orleans as a major city and a world port. Both projects have had a strong impact on other parishes, however, and none more strong than that on the parish of St. Bernard, which has lost approximately 30,000 acres to these two projects and their associated spoil banks, and perhaps twice that amount in the deterioration of its coastal zone. This coastal area, as you know, provides the livelihood for thousands of Louisianians. I am writing to ask your assistance in ensuring that the delegation and the Congress are presented with measures that will offset these losses to the fullest possible extent.

One opportunity which presents itself is your District's current study for the mitigation of the Lake Pontchartrain Hurricane Protection project. I understand from briefings by members of your staff that 51 percent of the Hurricane Protection project's losses have been visited on St. Bernard. To my suprise, however, none of the measures recommended to offset these losses will take place in St. Bernard. The parish where these measures now appear likely to be recommended, St. John, was not affected by the Hurricane Protection project in any way. Even more to my surprise, I learn that local costs for the mitigation are to be allocated by damages to the parish, not by mitigation received. Thus, St. Bernard is asked to pay 51 percent of the local costs for erosion control three parishes away.

There is an obvious fairness problem here. If your house is damaged, you do not repair someone else's; even less would you then want the bill. I understand the rationale for locating the mitigation work outside St. Bernard to be that other sites are less expensive. By the same token there may be cheaper ones in Arkansas. In our view, locating mitigation anywhere beyond the damaged area is a decision which ought to be made if

restoring one damaged area is simply not feasible. I do not understand this to be the case here. It also seems reasonable that local interests be charged in proportion to the benefit they receive. I urge you to consider these principles in your plan formulation. To the extent that their application requires a little more planning time, it would seem preferable to spend that time and produce a more equitable result.

A second opportunity which presents itself is in similar planning for the MRGO itself. As you know, the MRGO has produced by far the greater damage within St. Bernard. In addition to the area taken by the canal and spoil system, the drainage of the parish has been altered, marsh systems have decayed, and the canal itself is widening every year at a rate of, in some places, up to 36 feet per year. No proposal for the mitigation of these damages has been presented to the Congress. The problem is yet more severe. In at least two places the land remaining between MRGO and Lake Borgne is less than half a mile wide. With a few decades of erosion, or one major storm, the two will be joined and the future of the MRGO will be gravely threatened. The larger question here, then, asks what can be done to prevent fuether erosion, and under what authorites, and how soon.

By copy of this letter I am asking the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to consult with you at its earliest convenience under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act towards the preparation of a report under of this authority. In addition, I would like your most affirmative views on other existing authorites available to the District under which at least parts of this problem, if not the entirety, can be redressed. It may well be that, as with much complex development these days, the soloution willrequire the combination of several authorites and the best efforts of several parties concerned.

I look forward to planning here which will meet the problem as fully and fairly as possible. I am confident of that result, and I stand ready to consult with you and assist as the need may be.

Sincerely,

Billy

BILLY TAUZIN
Member of Congress