

Legislature approves plan

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Staff Writer

The Legislature today approved the state's \$50 billion Coastal Master Plan that includes protection and restoration projects for Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes.

About \$1.4 billion worth of projects that benefit Terrebonne Parish are part of the plan and have already been approved for engineering, said Terrebonne Parish President Gordy Dove.

"With all of the projects in play now, which is about \$1.4 billion, it's unheard of," Dove said. "We really got more than our fair share of projects."

The comprehensive plan includes projects aimed at reducing coastal flood damage and identifying locations where structural and nonstructural improvements will help to reduce flood risk. The estimated savings are as follows: The Morganza-to-the-Gulf levee system is expected to save just under \$1.5 billion over the next 25 years and just under \$3.5 billion over the next 50 years.

Projects from Larose to Golden Meadow are expected to save about \$100 million over the next 25 years and about \$800 million over the next 50 years.

Terrebonne-Houma nonstructural projects are expected to save about \$400 million over the next 25 years and about \$600 million over the next 50 years.

Every five years, the master plan is updated to include the latest needs of coastal parishes and implement the newest science available.

Overall, the plan includes 124 projects that help to build or maintain more than 800 square miles of land and reduce estimated damage by about \$8.3 billion each year by year 50.

Gov. John Bel Edwards said bills like the master plan are necessary to ensure the protection of the state's coastline.

"Louisiana, and the country, rely heavily on our coast. It provides jobs, protection and homes to citizens and natural inhabitants alike,

and we have an obligation to restore and protect it," he said.

The Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority said it will continue to look for money to help finance the plan.

"We have funding for the near future, but need to assure we receive the long-term funds we've been promised," said CPRA Board Chairman Johnny Bradberry. "We are also pursuing additional sources of long-term revenue, and equally important, methods of accelerating the permitting processes in order to expedite project implementation."

Major projects included in the plan include:

River Diversions:

A river diversion along the Atchafalaya River between the Wax Lake Outlet and Bayou Lafourche aims to divert freshwater into the Gulf Coast Intracoastal Waterway.

The project would help to reduce salinity levels in the Intracoastal Waterway with a flow of 5,000 cubic feet per second of water over the first 30 years of operation.

It would also help to deliver sediment to coastal areas and wetlands that would help to reduce land loss.

A Bayou Lafourche diversion of Mississippi River water would increase the bayou's freshwater flow capacity to 1,000 cubic feet per second.

Barrier Islands: The CPRA intends to restore the Terrebonne, Timbalier and Barataria barrier islands and shorelines, which serve as the first line of defense against storms and daily wave damage.

Whiskey Bay off Terrebonne Parish is being restored and local officials said it should be completed sometime next year.

Marsh Creation:

About \$90 million is included to plan, engineer and design the Terrebonne Bay Rim Marsh Creation. The project would help to create marsh in southern Terrebonne, which would provide benefits to the communities and the Morganza-to-the-Gulf protection system.

Nonstructural Risk Reduction:

Many projects include help to elevate and flood proof buildings, and help home and property owners prepare for flooding or move out of areas with abnormally high risk. Nearly \$1.4 billion in Terrebonne will be spent on flood-proofing non-residential properties, elevating homes and acquiring residential properties with extremely high flood risks. Nearly \$400 million will be spent in Lafourche.