

NEWS RELEASE

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Pointe Coupee Police Jury Approves Engineer Scope of Services for False River Restoration Project

*PEC Vice President Says Prep Work to Begin Right Away,
While Actual Construction to Coincide with Drawdown Next Year*

NEW ROADS, La. – The Pointe Coupee Police Jury on Tuesday (Sept. 10) approved a Scope of Services document that outlines nearly \$1.5 million worth of work to be managed by Professional Engineering Consultants (PEC) Corporation to implement Phase I of the False River Ecosystem Restoration Project.

The False River Ecosystem Restoration Project seeks to improve the water quality and aquatic habitat of the 3,200-acre oxbow lake. The State Legislature awarded \$500,000 for the project in 2012, and added another \$1 million to the project this year, making it possible for work to begin.

“This community has waited patiently for years for something to be done to correct the problems that have plagued False River for decades. I’m proud to say we have some state funding and now an approved scope of work. It’s time to get started,” State Rep. Major Thibaut said. “The hiring of the engineering firm and approval of the Scope of Services by the Pointe Coupee Police Jury marks a milestone in our efforts.”

The Scope of Services specifically outlines the engineering and design deliverables for the False River South Flats Ecosystem Restoration Phase I Project. The project will include island/terrace construction in the lake’s South Flats, which are located south of New Roads between Jarreau and Lakeland. That area has continued to become shallower over the years because of increased sedimentation in the lake, making it less navigable for boat traffic and less habitable for local fish species.

According to the document approved by the Pointe Coupee Police Jury, PEC will submit three design alternatives to handle the material dredged from the lake. Alternatives include

island/terrace building and hydraulic dredging to remove silt and deposit it in deeper waters or on nearby land. The number and size of the islands/terraces and the dredging method will be dependent upon geotechnical data, which will characterize the properties of the lake bottom's sediment, and be critical in developing the cost of gathering the dredged material and constructing the islands/terraces.

"We've already begun getting estimated costs on bucket dredging and hydraulic dredging, to get an idea of how many terraces or islands we might be able to create. We will get a better handle on the cost when we begin to analyze the sediment at the bottom of the lake to determine how well it will hold up as base material for these islands or terraces. The consistency of the material will indicate the size and shape of these terraces or islands. All of this information is necessary for the design process to proceed," PEC Vice President Gerald W. Babin, Jr., said.

Babin said the Scope of Services also lists his company as the contracting party responsible for obtaining all necessary permits and rights of way to construct the project, as well as monitoring all efforts, to keep them in line with design specifications and budget projections.

Babin said he anticipates PEC will complete the project designs by the end of the year and finalize the permitting process by the end of the summer of 2014, which will coincide with the time when the lake will be drawn down by approximately two feet.

Wildlife and Fisheries Director of Inland Fisheries Mike Wood said the drawdown will be confined to a five-month period between September 2014 and February 2015, which will allow water levels to be restored for spring fish spawning. He said the decision to lower the lake's water level by approximately two feet is in the range of the lake's most recent, naturally occurring low level, and it is enough to expose a large section of the lake's bottom in the South Flats.

Babin said an approximate two-foot drawdown would expose some 83 acres of the lake bottom in the South Flats, making it easier and cheaper to dredge the material and use it to create the islands/terraces or remove it from the lake.

“In the coming months, it will be important that we have identified the most effective, most affordable means of dredging the sediment and creating terraces or islands that will prove to be suitable habitats for popular fish populations and that will also have a minimal impact on boaters and other recreational users of False River, so we can maximize our window of time during the drawdown,” Babin said.

Thibaut noted that under the state’s funding provisions, a local government body must be responsible for receiving and dispersing the funds for the project. The Pointe Coupee Police Jury is charged with implementing the project, though recommendations by the False River Watershed Council have been well received and fully implemented so far through the process.

He noted that the False River Watershed Council presented a comprehensive report to state legislators in the spring, detailing the various issues and potential remedies of the restoration effort. The report included information on silt discharge from local canals, available shell beds in the lake, target areas for dredging to lessen turbidity and improve the lake bed, options for constructing islands/terraces to enhance aquatic habitat, and the need to drawdown the lake’s water level to consolidate shallow lake beds and more affordably dredge and remove debris.

He also said in addition to the \$1.5 million in state funds already allocated to the project, State Legislators have earmarked another \$1.2 million in Priority 5 state funding for False River’s restoration efforts – additional monies that he hopes will be “moved up” and made available to spend by the end of next year’s session. At the same time, he said local NRG Energy officials are finalizing their efforts to contribute a significant sum to the restoration effort, which they will announce once all legal and accounting groundwork is complete.

Thibaut said individuals, civic associations and businesses can also make tax-deductible donations to the restoration effort, by sending monies to the Baton Rouge Area Foundation/False River Restoration Fund, 402 N. Fourth Street, Baton Rouge, La., 70802 or by paying online at www.braf.org.