COASTAL IMPACT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
(CIAP)
Tier II

1. PROJECT TITLE: St. James Parish West Bank Wetland Conservation and Protection, Phase III

2. ENTITY NOMINATING THE PROJECT: St. James Parish Council

3. CONTACT INFORMATION: Mr. Jody Chenier
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4. TOTAL CIAP FUNDS REQUESTED: $558,693

5. PARISH CIAP FUNDS REQUESTED: $558,693

6. STATE CIAP FUNDS REQUESTED: None

7. INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDS PROPOSED: None

8. DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION OF PROJECT: The St. James Parish Council would like to purchase several large tracts of existing wetlands to prohibit the destruction and aid in the protection of our Parish's coastal wetland areas. This project is proposed to purchase approximately 385 acres of existing wetlands from the Bayou Chevreuil Land Co., LLC. The areas the Parish would like to purchase and protect wetlands that adjoin a major state highway that links the communities of South Vacherie in St. James Parish to Chackbay in Lafourche Parish. The purchase of these tracts will eliminate any future development along this 1.8 mile stretch of LA Highway 20.

   The purchase of these tracts will provide for the protection of 385 acres of healthy cypress swamp in St. James Parish. It is the intention of the St. James Parish Council to create a Louisiana Conservation Servitude on the entire 385 acres. The Bayou Chevreuil Land Co., LLC is the legal owner of the proposed land to be purchased. There are no liens, encumbrances, easements, or restrictions on the property proposed under this project.

   The soil survey of the site as depicted in the "Soil Survey of St. James and St. John the Baptist Parishes, La." (1973) show the soil types to be Barbary association (Ba); Barbary-Fausse association (BB); Commerce silt loam (Cm); Commerce silty clay loam (Cn); Convent complex (Cr); and Sharkey association, frequently flooded (Sm). Elevations on the site range from 0.5 to 5.0 feet above NGVD for mean sea level. The majority of the site remains saturated or inundated for most of the year.

The site is dominated primarily by facultative-wetland and obligate-wetland plant species. The dominant species include bald cypress, water tupelo, Drummond red maple, American elm, alligator weed, and water hyacinth. Some upland species grow on the spoil banks of the highway borrow canal and the Dredge Boat Canal. These include sweetgum, water oak, overcup oak, nuttall oak, willow oak, bitter pecan, and green ash.

The proposed project is located in St. James Parish, in Sections 33 and 28, Township-13-South, and Range-17-East, South Vacherie, La.

9. PROJECT TYPE: Conservation, restoration, and protection of coastal area, including wetland.

10. PROJECT JUSTIFICATION: Approximately 235 acres of cypress swamp and will be preserved once purchased from this land owner. The property is vital to prevent commercial and residential development along this existing state highway. The conservation and protection of these wetlands would make significant progress towards sustaining a coastal ecosystem that can support and protect the environment, economy, and wetlands of southern Louisiana. The benefits from purchasing this property include hurricane protection, flood control, control of wetland impacts due to development, and protection of a critical ecological system. The program provides both near-term and long-term benefits and, at a cost of less than $1,600 per acre, is considered highly cost effective in addressing the protection of coastal and wetland areas. This project addresses the goal of the Louisiana Coastal Area (LCA) Ecosystem Restoration Plan towards the reversing of the current trend of degradation of the coastal ecosystem and destruction of critical wetland habitats. The purchase of the property coupled with the re-establishment of natural hydraulic water flow through the removal of existing continuous spoil banks will enhance the entire site. This plan will reintroduce natural flood flows along the drainage canals that are now cut off from needed nutrients and sediments. The project not only provides multiple benefits for wetland preservation and enhancement, but also allows for flood protection by providing a large natural water reservoir and hurricane protection from wind and storm surge.

11. PROJECT COST SHARE (NON-CIAP FUNDS): The Parish will use its own equipment and labor to cut slits in the existing spoil banks. The existing spoil banks will be breached to allow water to move in and out of the swamp land areas. Natural and man-made ditches that are presently full of sediment will be dredged to restore natural drainage through the impounded swamps. It is estimated to complete the opening and creation of slits in the existing spoil banks would take approximately 25 days. The Parish cost associated with the project includes equipment $22,500 and labor $8,000. Therefore, the Parish is prepared to match the CIAP monies with in-kind contributions of $30,500.