

# MISTER GO ISN'T GONE YET:

## Creating Community and Environmental Resiliency in the Wake of a Man-Made Catastrophe



Photo Credit: Southeastern Louisiana University

Before the MRGO, the Bayou Bienvenue Triangle in the Central Wetlands was a cypress swamp. Through restoration, we can return the area to the healthy ecosystem it once was. **Left:** Bayou Bienvenue Triangle **Right:** Healthy cypress swamp

Community members like you have played a critical role in the journey to close the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) and restore the vast ecosystem damaged by the channel. Today, with the Army Corps' MRGO restoration plan open for public comment this summer (2010) and the Congressional request for funding on the horizon, the community's voice - your voice - is more important than ever.

**YOU CAN HELP URGENTLY RESTORE THE COASTAL WETLANDS DESTROYED BY THE MRGO AND ENSURE THE GREATER NEW ORLEANS AREA IS A HEALTHY AND RESILIENT PLACE TO LIVE.**

In 2007, Congress directed the Army Corps of Engineers to close the channel and plan for restoration. **ALTHOUGH THE CHANNEL IS NOW CLOSED, THE CORPS IS ALREADY TWO YEARS BEHIND ON RESTORING THE DAMAGE IT CAUSED TO OUR COASTAL WETLANDS. THESE WETLANDS ARE VITAL TO THE SAFETY OF OUR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES. WITHOUT THIS FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE, WE ARE LEFT DANGEROUSLY EXPOSED TO STORM SURGE EVENTS.**

The Army Corps of Engineers constructed the MRGO in the 1960s. The MRGO is a 76-mile long channel that served as a navigation shortcut from the Gulf of Mexico to the heart of New Orleans. The channel was improperly maintained and resulted in severe damage to nearly 60,000 acres of coastal wetlands that once protected communities in New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish from storms.

**IN 2005, HURRICANE KATRINA SHOWED HOW VULNERABLE THE MRGO HAS LEFT US.** By destroying the wetlands, the MRGO made Hurricane Katrina more deadly. The levees, exposed to the deep open water of the channel, were decimated. In addition, the MRGO increased storm surge by forming a funnel that focused wind-driven flood waters into the heart of the New Orleans Metropolitan Area and St. Bernard Parish.

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# RESTORING OUR ECOSYSTEM AND OUR PROTECTION



Project Recommendations by the MRGO Must Go Coalition

- ① Violet Diversion
- ② Central Wetlands
- ③ Bankline Restoration
- ④ Lake Borgne Land Bridge
- ⑤ East Orleans Land Bridge
- ⑥ Biloxi Marsh Land Bridge
- ⑦ Bayou la Loutre Ridge
- ⑧ Gosier Barrier Islands

THE MRGO MUST GO COALITION HAS CONSULTED WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS AND EXPERT SCIENTISTS TO DEVELOP EIGHT PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESTORATION.

One of the highest priority projects is the **Violet Diversion**. The diversion will reintroduce freshwater from the Mississippi River into the wetlands along the MRGO to restore historical salinity levels. The project will help:

- Mitigate historical impacts of the MRGO channel
- Improve fish and wildlife habitat
- Increase the resiliency of coastal wetlands that buffer storm surge to erosion, subsidence, and sea level rise

The freshwater flow from Violet will allow cypress forest recreation and marsh recreation in other project areas like **Central Wetlands** and **Biloxi Marsh**.

Another priority recommendation is **bankline restoration**. As the original 1965 MRGO banklines eroded, the resulting open water increased the risk of wave attacks on levees. Bankline restoration is essential to:

- Minimize damage from storm surge
- Protect the MRGO levees from surge and wave action
- Facilitate vegetation growth

PLEASE SEE [WWW.MRGOMUSTGO.ORG](http://WWW.MRGOMUSTGO.ORG) FOR DETAILS ON EACH PROJECT IN OUR REPORT, *MISTER GO ISN'T GONE YET*.

| Recommended Project      | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Violet Diversion         |      |      | ●    |      | ●    | →    |
| Central Wetlands         |      | ●    |      | ●    |      | →    |
| Bankline Restoration     |      | ●    | ●    |      |      | →    |
| Lake Borgne Land Bridge  |      | ●    | ●    |      |      | →    |
| East Orleans Land Bridge |      | ●    |      |      | ●    | →    |
| Biloxi Marsh Land Bridge |      | ●    |      | ●    |      | →    |
| Bayou La Loutre Ridge    |      |      | ●    |      | ●    | →    |
| Gossier Barrier Islands  |      |      | ●    |      | ●    | →    |

Key: ▬ Planning & Design    ▬ Construction    ▬ Monitoring

Project Timeline Recommendations by the MRGO Must Go Coalition. Project timelines must reflect the urgency of restoration—a storm surge buffer for communities at risk each hurricane season. These recommended timelines will have projects in place by 2014. Note: Forest development will take several years beyond 2014.

## LET'S GET IT DONE

The restoration of the MRGO ecosystem—our natural storm surge buffer—is critical to a sustainable, healthy New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish.

Progress made thus far on the MRGO closure and restoration would not be possible without the passion and dedication of local governments, scientists, and community advocates over the last several decades. Public involvement remains critical.

Proper restoration will require the continued support of the Greater New Orleans community. **THE ARMY CORPS' DRAFT RESTORATION PLAN IS SCHEDULED FOR RELEASE IN LATE MAY 2010 FOLLOWED BY 45 DAYS OF PUBLIC COMMENT.**

**WE ARE AT A PIVOTAL MOMENT. NOW IS THE TIME TO ENSURE RESTORATION HAPPENS BY COMMENTING ON THE CORPS' DRAFT PLAN FOR MRGO ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION AND ATTENDING ARMY CORPS PUBLIC MEETINGS THIS SPRING AND SUMMER.**

We must demand:

- A sustainable restoration plan (including all priority projects recommended by the MRGO Must Go Coalition) that reflects the unprecedented damage brought by the MRGO
- An implementation timeline that reflects the urgency of the communities at risk each hurricane season
- Funding and authorization to complete project construction by 2014

Your voice can ensure that the Army Corps, the State of Louisiana, and the U.S. Congress know that nothing less than a timely and carefully restored ecosystem is acceptable for our friends and families in New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish.

VISIT [WWW.MRGOmustGO.ORG](http://WWW.MRGOmustGO.ORG) TO LEARN MORE DETAILS ON PUBLIC COMMENT AS THEY BECOME AVAILABLE. WHILE YOU'RE THERE, JOIN OUR FACEBOOK PAGE FOR MRGO MUST GO UPDATES.



**LET'S DO IT RIGHT!**  
**RESTORE THE WETLANDS. PROTECT THE PEOPLE.**

The Corps has not met the schedule for the MRGO set by Congress in WRDA 2007, and anticipates that planning and construction will extend beyond 2015. The MRGO Must Go Coalition recommends a realistic and urgent timeline for construction completion by 2014.

| MRGO   | 2007 | 2008                                    | 2009                       | 2010                      | 2011   | 2012                         | 2013 | 2014                                       | 2015 |
|--|------|---|----------------------------|---------------------------|--|------------------------------|------|--|------|
| <b>Ecosystem Restoration</b>   |      |   |                            |                           |  |                              |      |  |      |
| <b>Congressional Timeline</b><br>(as written in the Water Resources and Development Act of 2007) |      | Draft Plan MRGO Closure and Restoration | Design of Violet Diversion |                           |  | Violet Construction Complete |      |  |      |
| <b>Army Corps of Engineers Project Timeline</b>  |      | Closure of MRGO                         | Draft Restoration Plan/EIS | Restoration Plan Complete |  |                              |      | Project Design & Construction Ongoing      |      |
| <b>Expected Implementation Timeline</b><br>(MRGO Must Go Coalition)                              |      |   |                            |                           | Restoration Plan Complete/ Construction Begins |                              |      | Recommended Projects Construction Complete |      |

**GET THE COMPLETE REPORT**  
**MISTER GO ISN'T GONE YET:**  
*Creating Community and Environmental Resiliency  
in the Wake of a Man-Made Catastrophe*

VISIT

**WWW.MRGOMUSTGO.ORG**

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**THE MRGO MUST GO COALITION IS A GROUP OF ENVIRONMENTAL, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONS WORKING TOGETHER TO RESTORE AND PROTECT COASTAL LOUISIANA AND THE PEOPLE WHO RESIDE THERE.**