



A Success Story

Environmental Justice and the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion Project

On April 20, 2010, the Gulf Coast was severely impacted by the [Deepwater Horizon oil spill](#), the largest offshore spill in U.S. history. For 87 days, oil flowed into the Gulf of Mexico causing ecosystem-wide damage. Since then, EPA and other federal Trustees have been working with the Gulf states to restore injured natural resources. This restoration includes one of the largest and most innovative coastal habitat restoration efforts ever—the [Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion \(MBSD\) project](#).

Located about 45 minutes southeast of New Orleans, the MBSD project will divert a portion of the Mississippi River’s flow to the Barataria Basin. The re-connection of the river and basin will transport sediment, freshwater and nutrients that have been lacking since previous infrastructure projects contained the Mississippi River to help reduce flooding. As the resulting sediment accumulates over the years and decades, about 20 square miles of wetlands are projected to be restored and sustained, creating habitat for a wide range of plants and animals and providing increased storm protection for residents in southeast Louisiana.

Robust Public Engagement

[Environmental Justice](#) is a core value at the Environmental Protection Agency. The MBSD project presented an opportunity for EPA to work with partner agencies to ensure that citizens’ lived experiences were incorporated—and environmental justice concerns were addressed—throughout key parts of the project’s development. This effort resulted in multi-cultural, multi-lingual populations being meaningfully involved in developing a package of mitigation measures to address their needs. It is EPA’s hope that the benefits of this project will extend beyond the important large-scale natural resource benefits to modelling good practices for Environmental Justice mitigation in future infrastructure projects.

Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys:

- The same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards; and
- Equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.

While the MBSD project’s anticipated benefits are considerable, the project partners were also concerned about adverse impacts, including for individuals living or working in the area. Construction impacts such as increased traffic and noise levels are expected in the community of Ironton, a community with Environmental Justice concerns located approximately 0.5 miles from the project site. Many others who likely will be impacted by project operations also belong to communities that have Environmental Justice concerns. To identify and address impacts, federal and state agencies conducted proactive outreach and engagement throughout the environmental review process. EPA staff from the Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights, Office of Water and Region 6 met with the state of Louisiana’s Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and their contractors throughout the development of the environmental review’s Environmental Justice analysis to ensure the document clearly laid out proposed Environmental Justice mitigation measures for public comment.

EPA advised project planners on ways to identify “pocket” populations that may have Environmental Justice concerns. These are populations that may comprise a small percentage of the overall community but could experience disproportionate impacts. CPRA conducted over 200 meetings with stakeholders who could be impacted and published a newsletter as part of its “Coastal Connections” outreach effort. These outreach efforts included considerations for stakeholders speaking a primary language other than English, and language interpretation and translation in Spanish, Vietnamese and Khmer were provided at each of the Environmental Impact Statement and Restoration Plan public meetings. Translators also facilitated participation by non-English speakers. Residents expressed concerns with potential construction impacts, potential flooding and reduced numbers of fish, shrimp and oysters. The project planners worked with community members to design mitigation measures. The result is a comprehensive package of mitigation measures that comprises \$378 million of the overall \$2.92 billion budget for the project.

Mitigating Impacts

The mitigation package includes measures to address impacts from construction work and changes to hydrology and fisheries. Some examples include:

Communication and Technical Assistance During Construction: Recognizing the unique vulnerability of the Ironton community, CPRA will engage a community liaison whose position will include receiving and responding to concerns from Ironton community members regarding project construction impacts. The community liaison is also assisting residents and natural resource users in understanding what assistance is available and how to obtain it (e.g., through a telephone hotline).

Flooding: For the communities outside of flood protection that may experience an increase in tidal flooding, it is important to EPA and project partners that affected residents understand this possibility and that there are measures for addressing flooding. These measures include increased elevations for roads, infrastructure and houses; creating floating gardens for subsistence agriculture; increasing the height of the bulkhead in the community closest to the project; ensuring that all buyouts of homeowners are voluntary; and/or financially compensating residents for impacts if they wish to remain in their homes.

Fisheries: Of the impacts to fisheries, the most significant anticipated impacts will be to oysters and brown shrimp due to sedimentation and changes in water salinity. EPA and project partners supported specific measures to ensure the long-term viability of the Barataria Basin fisheries, including funding set-asides for communities with Environmental Justice concerns and other measures, such as:

- Engaging community members to help with bedding and transplanting efforts to establish replacement oyster fisheries;
- Funding workforce training for fishers to transition to a different kind of fishing or learning skills for an alternative industry; and
- Providing new and different gear for shrimpers that allows them to continue to pursue brown shrimp as that species moves towards and into the Gulf of Mexico.

What Comes Next?

Next steps for the project partners involve additional outreach to and resources for these impacted communities, including multilingual outreach. EPA will stay engaged over the life of the project to ensure impacted residents’ experiences and concerns continue to be considered and addressed.