



VIA EMAIL TO DRIVEINITIATIVE@LA.GOV AND TYLER.GRAY@LA.GOV

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February 20, 2024

The Hon. Jeff Landry
Governor
State of Louisiana
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 94004
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Mr. Tyler Gray
Secretary
Louisiana Department of Energy and Natural Resources
Office of the Secretary
P.O. Box 94396
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Re: Comment on Executive Order JML 24-13

Dear Governor Landry and Secretary Gray:

The Bureau of Governmental Research (BGR) is a private, nonprofit, independent public policy research organization based in New Orleans. We are writing to comment on the governor's proposal to consolidate and reorganize the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) and the CPRA Board under the Louisiana Department of Energy and Natural Resources (the Department).

In September 2006, Louisiana voters took a new approach to hurricane protection and coastal restoration. The centerpiece was the CPRA, [which BGR supported](#). The CPRA raised the profile of coastal protection as a vital issue for Louisiana. It brought together functions of multiple state departments to centralize accountability. And it became responsible for coastal policy and comprehensive planning to use the public's resources effectively. Creating the CPRA was a pivotal move for Louisiana to secure federal government funding to rebuild from hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005.

Nearly two decades later, residents and businesses can see the benefits of having a stand-alone agency dedicated solely to restoring and protecting the coast. They enjoy much better protection from hurricane storm surge than ever before. Two years ago, the CPRA assumed control of the \$15 billion hurricane protection system for southeast Louisiana from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The CPRA has taken on the critical responsibility to operate and maintain the system in coordination with local

governments and levee authorities. The CPRA has also advanced a wide range of projects to rebuild natural wetlands to buffer future storm surges.

The public has [few details](#) on the proposed consolidation and reorganization. The Department could absorb the CPRA and its governing board. It also could absorb other state agencies, boards and commissions that deal with natural resources and energy. The governor's [executive order](#) and [memorandum](#) call for the Department's initial report by February 23. The memo states this is only a first step in the administration's review, not a final decision. The stated goal is to optimize, rather than eliminate, the essential functions of the entities involved.

The governor's memo offers only general reasons for this new approach. It states that "the current separation of related coastal, energy, emergency response, and state lands functions into distinct silos creates inherent inefficiencies, limits solutions and communications, and compromises effectiveness resulting in a waste of time, effort, and resources of tax dollars." The effort seeks a "more cohesive organizational structure."

State agencies, boards and commissions tend to pile up over many years. The executive order lists more than a dozen besides the CPRA. Any new governor should evaluate their necessity and seek efficiencies to save taxpayer money. But there are valid reasons to keep the CPRA and its board separate from the Department:

- **The work of the CPRA and its board is distinct from the Department's mission.** Protecting Louisiana's coast is a multi-agency effort. It goes well beyond the Department's mission of promoting sustainable and responsible use of Louisiana's natural resources. The membership of the [CPRA's board](#) reflects many interests in the coast's future and incorporates a broad range of perspectives into coastal policy making. First, the governor is closely involved. The executive assistant to the governor for coastal activities chairs the CPRA board. And, with input from levee boards and local governments, the governor appoints eight citizens from across south Louisiana. The Department's secretary is one of many state officials with a seat on the board. These officials all have relevant roles for the coast, including transportation, wildlife and fisheries, environmental quality, economic development, agriculture and forestry, insurance, and disaster preparedness and emergency response. This is far from operating in a silo. Consolidating the CPRA into Energy and Natural Resources could weaken this holistic approach. Even if the CPRA board remains, the Department's greater control could blur lines of responsibility for other board members.
- **The CPRA and its board provide public transparency and accountability.** The CPRA and its board act as the unified voice of coastal protection and restoration, which involves many communities and their local governments. They can participate in public CPRA meetings and planning sessions. And they can access the master plan, progress reports, interactive maps, educational videos and more on the CPRA's website, coastal.la.gov. They know the CPRA and its board are responsible, even if they may disagree with a policy decision. Placing the CPRA and its board within the Department could create confusion and reduce accessibility. It would be less clear whether the board or the Department is in charge. This could diminish public trust in the long-term restoration effort. Consolidation

into the Department also could reduce much-needed public visibility for the multi-decade coastal protection and restoration effort.

- **The CPRA and its board can help make the case for future federal funding for the coast.** Merging the CPRA into the Department would be a complex, multi-year task. It would require much attention to legislation, governance and operations. This may cost the state time and momentum to secure new federal funding. The [Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana has reported](#) that coastal funding will reach a “fiscal cliff” in about eight years. At that time, the state will run out of money from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill settlement. Funding, not the CPRA’s current structure and governance, is the major issue in coastal restoration and protection. The governor must keep that financial horizon in view. A distinct and independent CPRA can help make Louisiana’s case by keeping up the pace of coastal restoration projects.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Mowbray

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Samuel Zemurray Chair in Research Leadership

Bureau of Governmental Research