

The Pointe Coupee Banner

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Restoration of False River moving forward

The False River Watershed Council recently met to discuss the progress of the False River Ecosystem Restoration Project and receive an update from project engineers and contractor.

Currently, the most easily observed result of the work done in Phase 1 is in the South Flats area of the waterbody, where dredging in the southern reach of False River has provided the material for the creation of a containment dike "island."

That island is a ring-levee style containment feature built from material dredged from the south end of the False River that is also intended as an area that can receive material from future dredging projects. The material already dredged and placed is the equivalent of covering 22 football fields to a

depth of 5 feet.

The dredging of the South Flats area of False River will provide multiple benefits to water quality and fish habitat through removal of sediments that have lowered water quality, through providing additional water depth that will allow the area to maintain a cooler water temperature in a healthier range for fish and that allows for fish to establish new spawning areas to increase the population.

On the advice of the project lead engineer and request of the contractor conducting dredging operations in the South Flats area, the False River Watershed Council has recommended that the Pointe Coupee Parish Police Jury approve a 90-day extension of the timeline for completion of Phase 1 dredging in the area.

Though the dredging project could be completed within the original time schedule, the extension, which would come at no additional cost to the project, is being sought to give more time for disturbed sediments to settle in the area being dredged and improve the structural integrity of the island.

The extension would provide twofold benefits to the project, in that it would allow the contractor to draw out the remaining sediment from Phase 1 dredging more slowly and efficiently, and that it would allow for more drying time for sediment deposited on the containment island, which in turn increases the stability of the island. To better drain the material that is being dredged, the water levels in False River would be maintained at their current level of about 1 foot

below pool level until the dredging for Phase 1 is complete, according to the project engineer.

"While the project has gone as planned to date, it is important to make sure all aspects of Phase 1 are done right the first time," said State Rep. Major Thibaut, D-Oscar, who has led the effort to secure state support funding and the collaboration of state agencies for the project.

"The future work done in this area will be anchored by what we accomplish in this first phase, so we have to ensure that the foundation for this restoration project is solid."

At the same time, robust plant growth, including some initial tree growth, has already begun to provide anchoring vegetation for the South Flats Island, and wildlife

and birds have already begun to make use of the new habitat, according to Louisiana Department of Natural Resources officials who are monitoring the project. The island's containment area for dredged material is currently at design capacity for the first stage of the project, pending further settlement of the containment dikes.

Other benefits can already be seen in the return of aquatic plants near the shores of False River, which act also help to act as sediment filters, as well as habitats and part of the food chain for fish.

On the northern reach of False River, geotechnical borings and data collection have begun in preparation for engineering work on dredging and placement of dredged material from the North Flats area in the future. The time-

line currently calls for construction and other work in the North Flats to begin by the fall of 2016.

Plans are also moving forward for the creation of more spawning beds to supplement the spawning beds created by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in 2013, along with creation of several artificial reefs in False River. Planning for this work has begun and construction is expected to begin in the near future.

In other aspects of the False River Restoration Project, the council has received a determination that the area involved in the M-1 canal modification falls under U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) wetlands regulations, and a permit application is being submitted. The M-1 Canal is the pri-

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primary drainage pathway into False River and the council is seeking COE approval for construction of weirs and implementation of other structures and strategies to lighten the nutrient and sediment load the canal brings to False River. Funding is already in place for the M-1 Canal work as part of the \$1 million being provided by NRG for the project.

Erosion and sediments from nearby land have created water quality issues for False River over time, and the M-1 Canal modification is aimed at creating ways to intercept that runoff and sediment before the water reaches False River. At the same time, a permit application is being prepared on the M-2 canal for similar work, and hydrology is being studied for

potential work on the Lighthouse Canal, which is the main discharge for the flow from False River.

Additionally, the third season of commercial fishing in False River is set to begin on October 1. Commercial fishing improves recreational fishing by selectively removing rough fish that act as competition for or predators of sport fish.

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