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PRESS RELEASE

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Sierra Club Opposes New Reservoir Projects In Louisiana Asks Bond Commission to Hold Funds

New Orleans-The Sierra Club - Delta Chapter voiced their support for citizen groups in Allen, Washington and other parishes who are opposing a number of new dams and reservoirs that are proposed statewide.

The group adopted a resolution at their quarterly meeting in October that opposes the construction of any new dams anywhere in Louisiana.

The resolution further requests that the Louisiana Bond Commission withhold Lines of Credit that were authorized by the Legislature in 2004

The funding impacts reservoir development projects proposed in Allen Parish, Morehouse Parish, and Washington Parish, as well as Ouachita Water Supply Reservoir, a reservoir on Castor Creek-Little River, and another on Bayou DeLoutre.

In addition to opposing the reservoir projects, the Sierra Club is urging Governor Blanco to conduct a comprehensive study of the state's water needs.

“We should know more about what our needs are, before spending the state's meager financial resources to create a poorly planned system of reservoirs,” said Leslie March with the Sierra Club.

“The proponents say the reservoirs will provide recreation and water storage, but the impact of these projects on fish and wildlife, agriculture, and the economic effect on displaced homeowners has not been explored. Before we make costly and irreversible environmental changes, we should find out who will benefit and who will be hurt.”

She added that over \$21 million dollars of bond funds are set a side for these reservoir projects in 2004.

March cited adverse effects when wetlands are flooded by reservoirs, changing stream bank and shallow water habitat to deep water and cooler temperatures. Such changes can block species reproduction. Downstream flows are also affected, creating a domino effect of adverse impacts.

“We already have problems with mercury in our fish in Louisiana,” said March, “and the problem can actually be worse in recently flooded reservoirs. We should know more about that before making people think that these will be great places to take the kids fishing.”

Noting the focus that is currently being placed on “America’s Wetland”, the group questioned any proposals that would change or destroy native wetlands. A proposed site for the Washington Parish reservoir would flood the Pushepetappa Creek, designated as part of the Louisiana Natural and Scenic river system. The same reservoir would also flood Piggot’s Swamp, the home of an 18 foot wide, 800 year old cypress tree. This tree was recently commemorated as a Louisiana Purchase Cypress Legacy tree.

“Other states are removing dams and spending large amounts of money to rebuild wetland habitat,” said March. “Why is Louisiana proposing to fund these reservoirs without comprehensive study? We shouldn’t spend our money without knowing whether the short term recreational benefit of the proposed reservoirs will be worth the long term damage.”

March also pointed out that the legislation that authorized the projects allows land to be impounded without the owner’s consent.

“This land has been in some families for generations,” said March. “Citizen groups from Allen Parish and Washington Parish contacted us about their concerns because they couldn’t get any help from their elected officials. These folks are putting up yard signs, taking petitions door to door, and holding town meetings. They can’t believe that public input has been minimized by the legislation that authorized these projects.”

The Sierra Club – Delta Chapter has pledged to continue to work with the communities affected by the reservoirs.

“We all need to work together to make sure Louisiana is truly a Sportsman’s Paradise where we protect and preserve our scenic rivers instead of turning them into mercury contaminated lakes,” said Maurice Coman, Chair of the Sierra Club - Delta Chapter

The Sierra Club - Delta Chapter represents 4,000 of your friends and neighbors in Louisiana with 700,000 members nationwide. Inspired by nature, we work together to protect our communities and the planet. The Club is America’s oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization.



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF RESERVOIR DEVELOPMENT IN LOUISIANA

WHEREAS, the development of a comprehensive groundwater management plan for Louisiana is in its infancy, and

WHEREAS, the Louisiana Legislature and the Louisiana Groundwater Management Task Force have recognized the important link between the state's ground and surface water resources, and

WHEREAS, Louisiana has an abundant water supply in parts of the state, including the state's share of Toledo Bend water, and numerous reservoirs in other places, while experiencing shortages and aquifer declines in other areas, and

WHEREAS, there has not been a comprehensive review of the state's surface water needs with respect to public supply, industrial and agricultural uses, and fish and wildlife habitat within the context of reservoir development, and

WHEREAS, during the last session of the Louisiana Legislature, no less than 6 reservoir development projects were included in the capital outlay budget to receive funding for various stages of planning and development, including Allen Parish Reservoir, Morehouse Parish Reservoir, Ouachita Water Supply Reservoir, Castor Creek-Little River Reservoir, Bayou DeLoutre Reservoir and Washington Parish Reservoir,* and

WHEREAS, the development of reservoirs can severely impact fish and wildlife resources, forest and agriculture land, and generally substitute an abundant and increasing habitat type (open water, lacustrine habitat) for a diminishing habitat type (stream bottom, stream bank and riparian ecosystems, wildlife corridors), and

WHEREAS, new reservoirs consume land that supports forestry, hunting leases, and habitat for many wildlife species, including white-tailed deer, wild turkey, squirrel, and numerous nongame wildlife, and

WHEREAS, reservoir construction has the potential to drastically alter the important natural ebb and flow of streams, often with potential for significant adverse impact on downstream values, and

WHEREAS, segments of several streams within the Louisiana Natural and Scenic River System will be inundated or otherwise adversely impacted by the development of the aforementioned reservoirs, and

WHEREAS, private property is to be taken for the development of these reservoirs, even if the property owners are not willing to sell, and

WHEREAS, a number of concerned citizens groups have formed to oppose these proposed reservoirs, and

WHEREAS, the Sierra Club, Delta Chapter supports the efforts of these groups, and

WHEREAS, Article IX, Section I of the 1974-Revised Louisiana Constitution, as ruled on by the Louisiana Supreme Court, requires an agency or official, before granting approval of a proposed action, to determine that adverse impact has been avoided or minimized.

WHEREAS, Species that migrate for reproduction purposes are blocked by these reservoirs

WHEREAS, Mercury contamination is amplified by impoundments

WHEREAS, Endangered species are threatened and perhaps taken in this dam-building process

WHEREAS, Archeological and historical sites could be forever lost

WHEREAS, Valuable forests and farmland would be lost

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Delta Chapter of the Sierra Club opposes the construction of any new dams anywhere in Louisiana.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Delta Chapter of the Sierra Club requests the Louisiana Bond Commission not to issue any Lines of Credit (LOC) for these proposed reservoirs projects.

Adopted by the Delta Chapter Sierra Club by its Executive Committee, 17 October 2004, in New Orleans, Louisiana.

