

2017 MDEQ Restoration Summit Stakeholder Conversations Summary¹

The second annual Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) Restoration Summit included a Stakeholder Conversation session. During this session, stakeholders had the opportunity to sit down with MDEQ staff members and discuss topics regarding environmental and economic restoration activities resulting from the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. The topics discussed during this session included: sources of influence on water quality, oysters, restoration priorities, resiliency, habitat conservation, and general Restoration Summit feedback.

Sources of Influence on Water Quality:

Stakeholders indicated that there are generally water quality impairments in Biloxi, Mississippi, the Mississippi Sound, and in Pass Christian, Mississippi. Stakeholders identified road construction (i.e., sedimentation) in Biloxi, Mississippi, as a contributor of impaired water quality in the Mississippi Sound. Stakeholders expressed serious concern about the perceived lack of stormwater controls regarding the road construction in east Biloxi, Mississippi. Stakeholders commented that water quality is not only a beach-front issue, but also a stream and bay issue, particularly in the Back Bay of Biloxi. Stakeholders provided comments stating that water quality sampling should be done where the community lives and not on the beach front alone.

Stakeholders also indicated that there are sewer treatment plants in the Back Bay of Biloxi area that need upgrades and/or repairs, specifically the one along Keegan Bayou in Biloxi, Mississippi. Stakeholders recommended that MDEQ fund the upgrades necessary for all sewer treatment plants to include tertiary treatment, rather than only funding repairs to broken pipes and lift stations.

Stakeholders provided MDEQ staff with the following specific instances of what they believe to be water quality impacts:

- 1022 Church Street Handsboro, MS: a stakeholder explained that during rain events, the streams near his community overflow and cause flooding on this property. The resident stated that the flooding is so severe that he had to build a bridge in his backyard. The resident also expressed concerns that frequent pesticide is affecting the water quality. The resident also indicated that Tea Garden Street connects to Church Street and has similar flooding issues.
- Rose Drive in Moss Point, MS: A stakeholder identified a flooding situation due to drainage issues, and also indicated possible water pollution due to a paper plant no longer in use. The stakeholder explained that it seems like the runoff from that area leaves an oily sheen in the rain puddles.

¹ This document is intended only to be a summary of input received and statements made by stakeholders who participated in the Stakeholder Conversation session. This document is not intended, and should not be construed as an effort to, document all statements verbatim. MDEQ makes no effort in this document to address, and makes no representations regarding, any statement made by any stakeholder.

- Red Creek Off Road ATV Park: a stakeholder indicated that sedimentation issues were occurring at Red Creek in George County, specifically the Red Creek Off Road ATV Park (1192 Vestry Road, Perkinston, MS 39573).
- Teneco Canal: A stakeholder claimed that there is bacterial contamination in this canal, which is southeast of Pearlinton, and this is the site of an MDEQ oyster project.

Stakeholders provided the following restoration activities that they would like to see funded to address water quality:

- Better stormwater controls
- Water quality related data collection training for fisherman
- Implement flow meters for source tracking

Oysters:

Stakeholders expressed that red tides and harmful algal blooms are impacting the oyster and shrimp populations in the Mississippi Sound, specifically in the Pass Christian area. Stakeholders also expressed concern with potential freshwater diversion projects occurring upstream and the potential negative impacts those projects could have on the oyster population.

Stakeholders indicated that oyster reefs need to be cultivated in areas such as Pascagoula and Ocean Springs. Stakeholders also indicated reefs should be reopened to allow the fishermen to continue harvesting (e.g. St. Joe Oyster reefs).

Stakeholders identified cooperative research as a priority to increase oyster and shrimp populations in Mississippi. Stakeholders urged MDEQ to work closely with local fishermen regarding relay projects (RESTORE Act Bucket 1 Pascagoula Oyster Reef Complex project), water quality data collection, and the placement of restoration projects. Stakeholders articulated that new oyster reefs should be implemented in the locations of historic oyster reefs (i.e., Deer Island, Goat Island, White Avenue, etc.). Stakeholders also requested that MDEQ include workforce training in oyster-related projects.

Stakeholders, during this session, indicated an interest in an oyster shell recycling program in order to replenish the reefs with substrate. Stakeholders indicated that limestone should not be used for oyster reef restoration. One stakeholder commented that the dust from the limestone substrate that has been used in the past suffocates the oysters. Some stakeholders consider the \$19 million NRDA Oyster Cultch project as a failed opportunity and question what MDEQ has learned and how the other oyster investment projects are different.

Stakeholders also indicated that the oyster reefs in Ocean Springs and Pascagoula need restoration efforts, and that such reefs should not be left closed to the public.

Restoration Priorities:

During the stakeholder conversations, the participating stakeholders indicated that improving water quality is the top priority for restoration in Mississippi. Following water quality, restoring and conserving habitat, protecting living coastal and marine resources, restoring the Gulf economy,

and enhancing community resilience are top priorities for restoration. Some stakeholders expressed confusion at the rate at which MDEQ is spending funds on projects and raised questions regarding the thoroughness of the scientific research regarding the placement and methods around projects, specifically oyster restoration projects.

Some members of the public, during this session, indicated that restoring and revitalizing the Gulf economy is still a top priority, but also indicated that a coastal specific fund is needed for the community that they live in to ensure that each community is able to decide where their funds should be used. These stakeholders commented that community based participatory research is needed on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Stakeholders mentioned other restoration priorities, during this session, including the following: sustainable agriculture, alternative farming, and renewable energy, such as community solar farms, micro grids and training, workforce development and diversity. Additionally, stakeholders expressed interest in additional opportunities to participate in Trustee Implementation Group meetings and workshops.

Resiliency:

Stakeholders indicated that the following activities would make coastal communities more resilient to natural disasters in the future:

- The construction of a safe harbor for boats to dock that is away from potential disaster areas.
- A designated zone that is inland to be used for boat storage during hurricanes/tropical storms.
- Buildings and structural projects paid for by *Deepwater Horizon*-related funding should not be constructed in any Special Flood Hazard Area -area.
- Wetland protection.
- Flood mitigation.

Stakeholders expressed the following about the Hancock County Marsh Living Shoreline project:

- Stakeholders indicated a concern about use of the term “living shoreline” since the structure is being constructed of rocks and hard structure.
- Stakeholders expressed a concern that the structure will block the flow of sediment and will restrict the natural movement of the shrimp lifecycle.
- Many stakeholders believe that this project is a prime example of projects moving forward without adequate public input or stakeholder engagement.

Habitat Conservation:

Stakeholders at the stakeholder conversation session had varying opinions on habitat conservation related restoration activities. Some stakeholders indicated that MDEQ should focus habitat conservation and restoration along riparian corridors such as Turkey Creek or the Pascagoula River. Stakeholders also indicated a need for prioritizing the acquisition of inholdings within wildlife management areas. These stakeholders also indicated that habitat conservation and

restoration in these areas should be a priority because of the following reasons: mitigate erosion, good investment of monies because wetlands should be protected, has value with eco-tourism, water quality. Other stakeholders expressed uncertainty on whether MDEQ should be acquiring lands with *Deepwater Horizon* funds at all. Other stakeholders indicated that MDEQ should focus all habitat conservation efforts on improving the marine habitat for oyster and shrimp populations.

One stakeholder provided a tract of land on I-110 corridor along Keegan Bayou as one specific example of a particular tract of land that could be used for habitat conservation. The stakeholder expressed that this tract is a significant tract of land that could be turned into a linear park/greenway that would enhance the bayou and enhance the surrounding community. The stakeholder also mentioned that this area is where there is the most urban development along the coast, but the least amount of natural restoration is occurring.

Other habitat conservation activities that stakeholders expressed should be considered included returning the beach back to a natural marsh and/or installing marsh around the beach outfalls.

General Restoration Summit Feedback:

Many stakeholders expressed an appreciation for the information presented throughout the day of the Restoration Summit. One stakeholder requested more information be provide about all projects, including progress reports, and expressed that information include not only the amount spent to date. Some stakeholders expressed interest in the inclusion of a traditional public hearing (public comment period where public comment is received via microphone) at future restoration-related events. Stakeholders also requested that the Restoration Summit be held quarterly. Stakeholders expressed disapproval with the timing of the event and the lack of refreshments. Stakeholders expressed that the Stakeholder Conversation Roundtables were held too late in the evening. Some stakeholders requested that the Mississippi Summit be quarterly and that the federal agencies hold a summit annually.