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October 24, 2011

The Honorable Lisa P. Jackson
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Jackson:

On behalf of EPA's Local Government Advisory Committee (LGAC), we are writing to convey the Committee's recommendations and observations regarding Gulf Coast restoration. As local government officials representing parishes, counties, municipalities, tribal nations, and other political jurisdictions, we appreciate you ensuring the involvement of local officials in the strategy development of the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force through public meetings, listening sessions and discussions, and presentations in the Task Force's public meetings.

This report was prepared by the LGAC's Gulf Coast Restoration Workgroup, which was chartered in February 2011 to provide advice to you regarding Gulf Coast ecosystem restoration. The workgroup is comprised of 16 local government officials who represent parishes, counties, and municipalities throughout the Gulf Coast region. These local officials are intimately familiar with the unique issues and concerns in their areas of the Gulf Coast and provide valuable, on the ground knowledge to EPA.

Our role, as EPA's LGAC, is to provide advice to you on how best to implement the policies and goals of Gulf Coast restoration from the perspective of local governments and authorities spread throughout the Gulf Coast. Through a meaningful collaborative process and ongoing dialogue with you and your Agency leaders, we hope to provide advice on how best to achieve and implement the preliminary *Gulf of Mexico Regional Ecosystem Restoration Strategy*.

Therefore, we ask that you and your staff keep in mind the following considerations for the overall finalization and implementation of the Gulf Coast ecosystem restoration strategy:

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1. Local governments must be a critical component of strategy implementation, as well as the continued engagement of local communities, tribes, interested parties, and the public to ensure they have an opportunity to share their needs and viewpoints. Fostering an inclusive dialogue and expanding public/private partnerships are critical components of long-term implementation and success. Coordinate all levels of government.
2. The Gulf Coast is its people, and vice versa. Help the public understand that the strategy is not an immediate fix by telling the story of the Gulf and its long-term problems. Use language that the public understands and eliminate agency-speak.
3. Federal policies and regulations are sometimes conflicting and contradictory. The confusions and complexities caused by such contradictions and overlapping jurisdiction impede coastal restoration and delay the efforts of states and local governments to implement projects.
4. Maintain a holistic approach to ecosystem restoration, recognizing that while many Gulf Coast communities have unique issues and problems, treat the Gulf Coast as a system without geo-political subdivisions.
5. The focus of the strategy must be implementation. For the major actions listed in the preliminary strategy, collaborate with local governments and communities; help determine where we have a role so that we can coordinate with the relevant state and federal agencies, figure out just how to implement those strategies on the ground, and be ready to address any issues that arise.

We have attached our report detailing the Committee's recommendations. This document identifies the Committee's primary areas of concern, which we ask you to keep in mind as the ecosystem restoration strategy is finalized and implemented. One of the most important issues identified by the Committee is the need to tell the story of the Gulf Coast in a way that people living in the region and around the country can understand. We need to help people realize the vital importance of the Gulf to the nation as a whole. The Gulf Coast is a national treasure.

Additionally, while the Workgroup understands that the EPA has a limited scope of jurisdiction in certain areas of the recovery and restoration process, the Workgroup has identified interrelated needs and priorities that have great impacts on the economic well-being and long-term viability, both economically and environmentally, of the Gulf Coast, such as the beneficial use of sediment and a long-term source of funding for Gulf Coast restoration. We ask that you share these concerns and recommendations with the appropriate agencies and officials and coordinate cross-agencies where possible for the good of the Gulf Coast.

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Finally, the Committee presents to you a list of action items that we will undertake as the strategy is finalized and moves into implementation. As local government officials, we are an essential link between federal and state governments and the people of our communities, and we take seriously the need to continue as constructive, effective partners for Gulf Coast restoration.

We appreciate your consideration in this matter and the attention and outreach you have done regarding Gulf Coast restoration. Please do not hesitate to call upon the experience of this advisory committee in moving forward so that what you envisioned and began during your tenure will continue in years to come.

Sincerely,

Mayor Heather McTeer Hudson
LGAC Chair

Mayor Randy Roach
Gulf Coast Workgroup Chair

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