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Organizations to plant tens of thousands of trees, other vegetation in Central Wetlands *NOAA, CPRA will pay for reforestation collective's work near New Orleans*

A consortium of Louisiana organizations will plant more than 30,000 trees, 33,000 plugs of marsh grasses and 40 plots of aquatic vegetation to re-establish a bald cypress and water tupelo bottomland hardwood forest near New Orleans starting this year. The Central Wetlands Reforestation Collective is receiving \$715,256 over three years from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and a commitment of \$404,643 from the state's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority over four years for the work.

The partners in the collective are the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, Common Ground Relief, the Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement & Development, the Meraux Foundation, the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry and Pontchartrain Conservancy. The project is also supported by the St. Bernard Wetlands Foundation, a critical landowner, financial supporter and founder of the efforts to reforest the Central Wetlands. The organizations expect to mobilize more than 2,000 volunteers. CRCL will be the administrator of the grants.

In a statement, the organizations in the collective said: "The Central Wetlands were once forest that served as wildlife habitat, recreational grounds and hurricane protection to numerous communities in southeast Louisiana. With these investments from the state and federal government, they will be forest again one day. The organizations comprising the collective are excited to be joining forces to amplify their strength to shape a better coast for Louisiana's future."

People can join the reforestation project as volunteers through the partner organizations. To learn about specific volunteer opportunities, check the groups' websites or follow them on social media.

The Central Wetlands are in St. Bernard and Orleans Parishes and are bordered by the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet (AKA MR-GO) and Hurricane and Storm Damage Risk Reduction System (HSDRRS) on the eastern side and the 40 Arpent Levee and Canal on the west side. Historically, the area was primarily bald cypress and water tupelo swamp, fresh marsh and bottomland hardwood forest. Factors including the opening of the MR-GO and heavy logging destroyed the forest that provided storm surge protection to New Orleans and St. Bernard. The MR-GO, which was blamed for helping funnel storm surge into St. Bernard Parish and the Lower 9th Ward during Hurricane Katrina, was closed in 2009, lowering the salinity of the water in the wetlands and re-creating the conditions that had existed there for centuries.

About 2,000 square miles of Louisiana's coastal wetlands have turned into open water since the 1930s. The Central Wetlands Unit has been identified as a priority restoration project in Louisiana's Coastal Master Plan.

The Central Wetlands Reforestation Collective meets regularly to amplify the impact of the work each organization does individually. Working alongside community stakeholders, this group uses native plant restoration projects to reforest wetlands, resulting in improved ecosystem services including mitigating the impacts of hurricanes, higher quality habitat and a stronger connection between communities and the landscape. These restoration projects are also a tool to educate and engage residents in the important work of coastal restoration.

Media Contacts:

James Karst
Director of communications
The Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana
504.220.7899
james.karst@crcl.org

Joshua Benitez
Co-director
Common Ground Relief
504-810-8801
joshua@commongroundrelief.org

Natalie Manning
Operations manager
Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement & Development
504-325-8599
nmanning@sustainthenine.org

Todd Ragusa
Communications consultant
Meraux Foundation
504-330-2202
todd@ragusaconsulting.com

Regina Wilkins
Director of development and communications
Pontchartrain Conservancy
504-407-7111
regina@scienceforourcoast.org

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[The Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana](#)'s mission is to unite people in action to achieve a thriving, sustainable Louisiana coast for all.

[Common Ground Relief](#) is dedicated to fostering environmental and community stewardship in southeast Louisiana so that residents can survive and thrive.

[The Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement & Development](#) is a grassroots organization devoted to restoring New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward as a safe, environmentally just and economically vibrant community – and one of the first to become carbon-neutral in North America.

[The Arlene & Joseph Meraux Charitable Foundation](#) is a private family foundation on a continuous mission to improve the quality of life in St. Bernard Parish. Its roots spread throughout the community to grow the economy, nurture the arts, enrich educational opportunities, empower young people, protect and restore our environment, and create resilience.

[Pontchartrain Conservancy](#)'s mission is to drive environmental sustainability and stewardship through scientific research, education, and advocacy.