

MISSISSIPPI COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

RESOLUTION for CONSIDERATION

Resolution Opposing the “One Lake Project”

WHEREAS, the Mississippi Coast Audubon Society (MCAS) is one of five active Chapters of the National Audubon Society (Audubon) in the State of Mississippi, thereby MCAS is part of the Audubon network; and

WHEREAS, Audubon has worked to protect birds and their habitats for many decades in the Mississippi River Flyway and Gulf of Mexico, which reflect their significance as rich ecosystems that annually support over 100 million migratory, nesting and wintering birds; and

WHEREAS, the Pearl River with its diversity of birds, fish, wildlife, and their habitats, serves as a key environmental lynchpin of the region, and is recognized as one of the most intact river systems in the southeast U.S.; and

WHEREAS, through the guidance of a local real estate developer, since 1996 the Rankin-Hinds Pearl River Flood and Drainage Control District (Drainage District) has pursued several plans that involve damming the Pearl River under the guise of creating new developable waterfront property along with questionable flood control benefits for the Jackson Metropolitan Area; and

WHEREAS, the Drainage District’s latest plan is known locally as the “One Lake” Project; and

WHEREAS, One Lake involves dredging 25 million cubic yards of sediment from a nearly 10-mile stretch of the Pearl River and constructing a dam to create a 1,900-acre lake; and

WHEREAS, One Lake poses significant, irreversible damages – directly, indirectly, and cumulatively – to the Pearl River, birds and their habitats; these ecological impacts go well beyond the immediate project footprint to include the downstream resources that lie along the 200-mile stretch of the Pearl below the proposed dam as well as Mississippi Sound, Lake Borgne, and the Gulf; and

WHEREAS, One Lake directly will destroy over 2,500 acres of habitat that supports Bald Eagles and several species of conservation priority songbirds, as well as a variety of fish and other wildlife; and

WHEREAS, One Lake will eliminate or alter critical habitat for several federally threatened species like the Wood Stork, Gulf Sturgeon, Ringed Sawback (map) Turtle, and Northern Long-eared Bat; and

WHEREAS, Audubon has identified several priority bird species that would be impacted in the One Lake project area, affected Pearl River Basin and downstream areas: Prothonotary Warbler, Swainson’s Warbler, Swallow-tailed Kite (Mississippi State Listed Endangered), Reddish Egret, Seaside Sparrow, and Wood Stork (Federal and Mississippi State Listed Endangered); and

WHEREAS, Audubon is concerned about One Lake’s impacts to Important Bird Areas (IBAs), including LeFleur’s Bluff State Park (MS), Hancock County Marsh Coastal Preserve (MS), East Delta Plain (LA), and Pearl River (LA; nominated); to which Audubon considers any impacts to IBAs unacceptable; and

WHEREAS, the Pearl River is the fourth largest source of freshwater into the Gulf, east of the mouth of the Mississippi River; and

WHEREAS, One Lake poses significant, permanent alterations to downstream flows of the Pearl River, including changes to sediment transport, water quality, and the fresh-salt water interface, which Audubon anticipates would result in destroying more habitats in the lower Pearl River basin, Mississippi Sound, and southeast Louisiana, including the Hancock and Biloxi Marsh; and

WHEREAS, these downstream wetland habitats serve as vital buffers to protect coastal communities by helping to absorb waters from flooding and storm events; and

WHEREAS, reductions to downstream freshwater flows of the Pearl River would jeopardize Mississippi’s \$891 million seafood industry that supports 9,491 jobs; and

WHEREAS, the Mississippi Governor’s Oyster Council Final Report (2015) identifies harm to oyster production and restoration from “inland freshwater depleting projects” on a major coastal river

like One Lake being planned for the Pearl; and

WHEREAS, changes to downstream hydrology of the Pearl River risks hundreds of millions of dollars in BP oil disaster restoration projects underway - or planned - for Mississippi and Louisiana, as these projects depend on stable salinities and will be less likely to succeed if fresh water discharge from the Pearl becomes diminished; and

WHEREAS, the dilution of effluent discharged into the Pearl River by 98 permitted industrial users and municipalities (e.g., NPDES permits) in Mississippi and 8 permitted users in Louisiana would be made more difficult and expensive by reduced freshwater river flows; and

WHEREAS, over a dozen downstream stakeholders have passed unanimous resolutions opposing One Lake, including the Mississippi Commission on Marine Resources; Marion, Lawrence, Pearl River and Hancock Counties; Town of Monticello; Louisiana State House and Senate; St. Tammany and Washington Parishes (LA); Town of Pearl River (LA); City of Bogalusa (LA); and City of Slidell (LA); and

WHEREAS, upon reviewing the Draft Study on One Lake, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concluded that it “is the most environmentally damaging plan”, and that the Drainage District should be required to produce a second draft that would provide “greater details regarding plan formulation, design, operation, mitigation, and adaptive management” before the project advances; and

WHEREAS, the Drainage District continually has failed to produce documents required by federal laws for adequate, timely public and scientific review, such as the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act Report, Independent External Peer Review Report, and Biological Opinion; and

WHEREAS, over a half-dozen toxic/hazardous sites that have been identified within or near the One Lake project area, which pose serious public and environmental health risks since One Lake would involve dredging 25 million cubic yards of sediment, a significant portion of which is to be used as fill material; and

WHEREAS, the One Lake proposal lacks scientific rigor, comprehensive modeling (i.e. upstream and downstream hydrology, water and soil sampling for possible contamination, sediment transport, etc.) and technical analyses, that are all essential components to fully and adequately assess impacts to environmental resources, public health, community interests, and economic sectors (immediate, upstream, and downstream); and

WHEREAS, the Drainage District has been passing its upfront costs onto taxpayers (i.e. to-date \$8 million in tax-payer money paid for feasibility studies); and

WHEREAS, the One Lake proposal acknowledges that its cost estimates for construction (\$345 million) and annual operations (\$13.9 million) are based on multiple assumptions and unknowns; the most recent unaccounted for project costs that have come to light include nearly \$110 million to replace nine bridges per the MS Department of Transportation and only \$8 million set aside to clean up 6+ contaminated sites yet the true cost is likely to be in the tens of millions of dollars; and

WHEREAS, a Mississippi Legislative PEER Committee report (2010) concluded that other alternatives flood control plans developed before 1996 offer less costly options that better address flooding concerns as compared to One Lake (e.g., improvements to existing levees, raising buildings and homes, or buying out properties with historical flooding problems); and

WHEREAS, if the true goal is to address flooding problems – real or perceived - in the Pearl River Basin, there is a recognition that approaches to flood control have evolved over the past decades to now emphasize the use of natural infrastructure; however, the Drainage District has failed to prioritize, consider or employ these less ecologically damaging, more comprehensive flood control measures.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Mississippi Coast Audubon Society is wholly opposed to the One Lake Project.

This resolution was passed by a unanimous vote on April 2, 2019 by the Board of Directors of the MS Coast Audubon Society.