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**INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON WORLD'S GREAT DELTAS
TO CONVENE IN NEW ORLEANS**

DELTAS2010 will Focus on Mississippi River as Model for Addressing Coastal Crises

NEW ORLEANS -- The inaugural meeting of DELTAS2010: World Delta Dialogues, an international forum bringing together restoration leaders and scientists from across the globe, to be held in New Orleans October 17-21, was announced today.

Participants in the invitational conference will focus on developing best practices and comprehensive strategies for creating sustainable deltas, using the imperiled Mississippi River Delta as a model.

The announcement followed a helicopter tour of the Mississippi River Delta early Tuesday as those hosting the conference viewed the land loss crisis from the air. "We've just flown over the seventh largest delta on earth – our Mississippi River delta," said Valsin A. Marmillion, managing director of the America's WETLAND Foundation. "As we are all aware, it is an incredibly endangered area experiencing one of the planet's greatest land lost rates requiring urgent and large-scale measures to save it."

The America's WETLAND Foundation (AWF), the Royal Netherlands Embassy, The Nature Conservancy, the Greater New Orleans Foundation, and National Conference of State Legislatures are partners in mounting this first-of-a-kind multidisciplinary event. Earlier planning design sessions were hosted by the Dutch in Washington, D.C., where international leaders helped to identify topics and the agenda for DELTAS2010. As with previous programming of the AWF, experts from varying interests have been invited to the event, representing environment, industry, government, science, engineering, fishing, and navigation.

"We have learned that finding a balance and building solutions in the interest of the public and all stakeholders may be the most difficult but only answer to survival of these valuable landscapes," R. King Milling, AWF Chairman, said. "In the working deltas of the world we have provided the infrastructure and resources for great economies and progress, but the key question is, at what price?" continued Milling. "We are asking all interests to consider the future and tie the economics to environmental sustainability for a livable world after we are gone."

The conference timing is most relevant to discuss strategies for community resiliency in the midst of the chaos and confusion of the Deepwater Horizon disaster, where media focus on the loss of vital wetlands has demonstrated the vulnerability of the region and its residents to natural and manmade events.

DELTAS2010 will draw from “the best and the brightest” working in the Mississippi River Delta and from other major deltas in crisis, including the Rhine in Germany, the Ganges in India, the Yangtze and Yellow in China, and the Mekong in Vietnam. Delegations from the Netherlands and Europe will also join in the sessions, uniquely designed to engage a multi-disciplinary approach. Conference coordinators determined this approach key to complex research, design, planning and policy development required to save a system that often crosses state and national jurisdictions.

Participants will include government officials, foundations, NGOs, policymakers, business and industry executives and scientists.

“At DELTAS2010, much of the focus will be on tradeoffs necessary to restore this invaluable ecosystem and all it provides economically. Fostering mutual understanding and supporting the interests of diverse stakeholders is important,” AWF’s senior advisor, Sidney Coffee, said. “But, as we all know, there will be long and short term impacts for all users of this delta region and the time is here to come to grips with the hard choices and help foster the political will to get it done.”

Karen Gautreaux of The Nature Conservancy said that they have been monitoring the impacts of the oil spill across the Gulf coast and it has added an exclamation point to an already critical situation. “It is very clear that recovery of the oil spill must go beyond responding to the spill,” Gautreaux said. “It must address restoration of the whole system – from rivers to oyster reefs, seagrass beds to marshes.”

The Nature Conservancy “is proud to join the America’s WETLAND Foundation in convening DELTAS2010,” Gautreaux said. “We believe in restoration and renewal – and although nature is incredibly resilient, the impact of separating the wetlands from the River as a life source has taken a terrible toll on vital wetlands, people, animals and marine species the wetlands support. Hopefully, this conference will give us insight that will expedite restoration across some of the world’s most productive ecosystems.”

Dr. Robert Twilley, professor, LSU Department of Oceanography & Coastal Sciences, said a 2006 group of international scientists brought together by the America’s WETLAND Foundation to envision the future of the Gulf Coast arrived at technically sound suggestions for reversing coastal loss. He added that further consideration is now needed to address impacts and resiliency issues such as tourism, policy and regulatory considerations, fish, oysters and wildlife habitat community and cultural interests, navigation, transportation and energy.

“But these challenges and the tradeoffs required will be front and center at DELTAS2010,” Twilley said. “We are populating the working groups with experts in all the diverse interests of most deltas.”

“Since the 1930s, the leveeing of the river has deprived Louisiana’s marshes of fresh water and nutrients starving the wetland and resulting in dramatic loss of land. What has evolved is a complex problem of returning the values of this place in ways that reduce harm,” Twilley said.

Dr. Denise Reed, University of New Orleans scientist and marsh expert, noted that the 2006 technical group convened by the AWF included experts in geology, ecology, engineering and economics from the U.S., the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Egypt, Italy and Australia.

“It was the strong consensus of the group that sustainable restoration of the coast and all it supports can only be achieved by redirecting the flow of river sediments away from the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico where they are wasted and can cause harm in the form of a growing hypoxic or dead zone,” Reed said. “We agreed that we must stop wasting sediment and that aggressive action was needed to use resources of the Mississippi River system to rebuild and replenish coastal Louisiana.”

At DELTAS2010, we will discuss potential solutions and trade offs and identify critical opportunities for additional research,” Reed said. “It’s exciting and I can’t wait to get started as this has great potential for Louisiana to emerge as a world restoration leader much as the Netherlands are respected for their water management expertise.”

State Sen. Joel Chaisson, D-Destrehan, was joined by William Pound, executive director of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), in announcing that, as part of the conference, they will convene delegations of legislative leaders from the four states of America’s Energy Coast – Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

Pound said the NCSL is pleased to help plan DELTAS2010. “The issues of federalism and the ability of an individual state to exercise its right to protect its people are intertwined with the disasters that have plagued the Gulf Coast,” Pound said. “It is central to ask the question of how a state creates the political will to solve a problem that impacts the nation,” continued Pound. “I am particularly grateful for the leadership the Louisiana Legislature has shown in standing its ground in the face of what is sometimes a federal onslaught of conflicting policies and regulations that make coastal restoration so difficult.”

Sen. Chaisson said, “Being able to sit together and discuss the impacts coastal deterioration has on our region and ways for states to maintain their authority in the face of federal policy is key to our future as a viable coast for both environmental and economic reasons. Louisiana has taken a lead by putting federal dollars in a trust fund for restoration, by establishing a comprehensive plan for coastal restoration and protection and putting up monies to begin the restoration process. We know that we have no time to waste,” concluded Chaisson.

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DELTAS2010: World Delta Dialogues is an initiative of the America's WETLAND Foundation and is made possible by the generous support of the following: The Royal Netherlands Embassy, The Nature Conservancy, The Greater New Orleans Foundation, Shell, Chevron and Entergy. Learn more about the conference at www.deltas2010.com

The America’s WETLAND Foundation manages the largest, most comprehensive public education campaign in the Louisiana’s history. The Campaign is raising public awareness of the impact of Louisiana’s wetland loss on the state, nation and world. The initiative is supported by a growing coalition of world, national and state conservation and environmental organizations and has drawn private support from businesses that see wetlands protection as a key to economic growth. For more information, visit www.americaswetland.com.