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Division of Administration

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## Gov. Edwards Announces Launch of Louisiana Watershed Initiative

*Sets Long-Term Vision for Statewide Sustainability and Resilience*

Baton Rouge, La. – Today, Gov. John Bel Edwards announced the launch of the Louisiana Watershed Initiative and a long-range vision for the state’s multi-pronged approach to mitigating future flood risk focusing on natural boundaries, not political ones.

The Louisiana Watershed Initiative is officially being launched as a continuation of the planning, coordination, and collaboration across various federal, state, and local agencies in direct response to the historic flooding events of March and August 2016.

In May 2018, Gov. Edwards issued Executive Order JBE18-16, creating the Council on Watershed Management and a coordinated, interagency structure at the state level under which all Watershed Initiative efforts will be coordinated and managed.

“In March and August of 2016, Louisiana residents suffered tremendous loss due to flooding events that forced us to rethink how our state approaches floodplain management and acknowledge that the status quo is no longer an option,” said Gov. Edwards. “The Louisiana Watershed Initiative represents a shift from business as usual in Louisiana and a model for how best-in-class science, engineering, and objective decision-making at a watershed level will form the basis of flood risk management across our state in the years and decades to come.”

The Council on Watershed Management is composed of Secretaries and Executive Directors of the Office of Community Development (OCD), the Department of Transportation and

Development (DOTD), the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA), the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP), and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF). Over the past several months, in response to EO JBE18-16, these agencies have overseen the development of this statewide, watershed-based floodplain management program, or the Louisiana Watershed Initiative, supported by subject matter experts across various agencies through technical advisory committees.

Each committee is responsible for ensuring the Council on Watershed Management seeks input from stakeholders across the state and operates with the best available information when making decisions that relate to statewide floodplain management. Collectively, dozens of experts are already contributing to actions that will impact millions of Louisiana residents, ensuring that objective science, best practices, and industry expertise are constants across all such decisions. As the Louisiana Watershed Initiative continues to advance, the expertise and knowledge of organizations, local jurisdictions, professionals, and universities across the state will be sought out and incorporated into ongoing planning efforts.

Through the Louisiana Watershed Initiative, the Council on Watershed Management has established six strategic areas to guide planning, projects, and policies toward long-term flood risk reduction and quality of life improvement across the state. These strategic areas and their associated goal outcomes are:

- **Data.** Relevant, living models and data in each watershed that are used for land use, policy decision-making, and project evaluation.
- **Engagement.** Stakeholders from all sectors and corners of the state have contributed and bought into the program and its outcomes.
- **Standards.** Jurisdictions across Louisiana demonstrate leadership in understanding and developing standards that are in alignment with state objectives, while the State of Louisiana demonstrates leadership by adopting these regulations and adhering to them before asking watershed, parish or municipalities to do so.
- **Funding.** Sustainable funding sources for each watershed to meet near and long-term project and maintenance needs, and for the State to maintain support and leadership capability.
- **Capability and Capacity.** Watersheds and their jurisdictions and the State have the resources, staff, skills, and tools necessary to effectively reduce flood risk to the existing built environment and limit risk through future development, redevelopment and project implementation.
- **Integrated Planning.** Each watershed has a plan that was developed by its member parishes, is aligned with the state plan and vice versa, and the state plan is supported by existing programs and state agencies.

In the coming months, the cooperating agencies that comprise the Council on Watershed Management will be introducing a number of efforts focused on statewide flood risk reduction. Such efforts include pursuing a standardized and coordinated approach to data

required to understand and address statewide flood risk, identifying and closing gaps where data may need to be refined or is non-existent, analyzing where cost-sharing gaps may exist at a local or regional level for key flood risk reduction and resilience projects, building robust criteria for selecting and funding watershed-based projects for eligible river management activities and more.

In addition, the Louisiana Watershed Initiative will support local jurisdictions in providing guidance on the most effective approaches to minimize flood risk reduction within Louisiana communities, guided by best practices, data, and science. Above all, these efforts will be driven by state agencies in a coordinated and objective manner that emphasizes collaboration and trust building across all involved agencies, jurisdictions, stakeholders and citizens.

[Click here to access the Louisiana Watershed Initiative vision white paper.](#)

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