



DARYL G. PURPERA,
CPA, CFE

Report Highlights

Comite River Diversion Canal Project Status and Reasons for Delays

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Why We Conducted This Audit

We evaluated the status of and reasons for delays with the Comite River Diversion Canal Project (Comite Project). We conducted this review because approximately \$117 million has been spent on the project, and only one of the 27 construction components has been completed. In addition, the project was originally estimated to be completed in 2012 at a cost of \$153 million. If all funding were received today, current estimates indicate that the project would take two to three years to complete and may cost as much as \$313 million. Funding for the Comite Project comes from a combination of federal, state, and local sources.

What We Found

We identified the following issues as reasons for delays with the Comite Project:

- **A lack of consistent and sufficient funding for the U.S Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) is the primary reason that the project has not moved forward, resulting in little construction progress since 2000.** Only one of the 27 construction components of the project – the Lilly Bayou control structure – has been completed. Also, federal funds not spent in the year in which they are appropriated can be reprogrammed, and more than \$200 million in federal and state funds are still needed to complete the project. The exhibit below shows the four agencies involved in the Comite Project, a description of their responsibilities, and the amount they have expended to date.

Agency	Responsibilities	Amount Spent
Amite River Basin Commission (ARBC)	Floodplain Management and Hold Title to Lands	\$18,977,061
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps)	Design and Construction	78,401,573
Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD)	Acquisitions of Lands, Easements, Rights of Way, Relocations, Disposals, and Finance Cost-Share	19,881,501
East Baton Rouge Parish (EBR)	Maintenance of Canal and Mitigations Land (upon Project Completion) and Final Title to Lands	0
Total		\$117,260,135

Source: Prepared by LLA using self-reported information from ARBC, the Corps, and DOTD.

- **Insufficient purchasing of mitigation land by the Corps when it was acting on DOTD’s behalf for Lands, Easements, Right of Ways, Relocations, and Diversions (LERRDs) caused delays in the project, which is the reason DOTD took back LERRDs.** In addition, state legislation in 2010 prohibited the expropriation of land for the Comite Project, which resulted in the Corps having to identify new mitigation land.
- **The current construction delay is the U.S. Highway 61 bridge construction and the associated utility relocations that must take place.** DOTD must relocate utilities, such as pipelines and telecommunications lines at this location prior to bridge construction; however, DOTD stated that it is concerned that no federal funding will be approved for the project and money spent to relocate utilities will therefore be wasted.

In addition, stakeholders cited the need for a more comprehensive plan to help alleviate flooding issues along the entire Comite and Lower Amite River Basins.

View the full report, including management’s response, at www.la.gov.