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AGENCIES SEEK INPUT ON FIRST STATE-WIDE PROGRAM TO PROMOTE REGIONAL RESTORATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES INJURED BY OIL SPILLS

Federal and Louisiana state natural resource trustee officials will hold two public meetings on June 23, 2003, to solicit comments on a new Louisiana Regional Restoration Planning Program designed to restore natural resources injured by oil spills.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the U.S. Department of the Interior and the State of Louisiana are proposing a state-wide program to increase restoration of natural resources injured by oil spills. Eighteen percent of the nation's oil spills occurred in Louisiana between 1991 and 2000, making this program especially appropriate to the state. NOAA is part of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The new program will expedite and reduce the cost of the natural resource damage assessments (NRDA) — the process by which trustee agencies assess and restore resources injured by oil spills. As part of the program, nine regional restoration plans will be developed. Each regional plan will identify restoration projects that may be used to address injured natural resources.

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The trustees are requesting that all comments on the Louisiana Regional Restoration Planning Program/ Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (DPEIS), that was released on May 9, 2003, be submitted by July 9, 2003. Trustees have scheduled two public meetings on June 23, 2003, in Baton Rouge, La., to receive comments. The daytime meeting will be held at 2 PM and the evening meeting at 6:30 PM. Both meetings will be held at the —

Department of Natural Resources
1st floor-LaBelle Room
LaSalle Office Building
617 N. 3rd Street
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

For more information about the Louisiana Regional Restoration Planning Program, or to submit comments on the DPEIS via fax, please contact William Conner (phone 301-713-3038 x190; fax 301-713-4287) or go online at: http://www.darp.noaa.gov/.

The NOAA Damage Assessment Center is located in the National Ocean Service which is dedicated to exploring, understanding, conserving and restoring the nation's coasts and oceans. The National Ocean Service balances environmental protection with economic prosperity in fulfilling its mission of promoting safe navigation, supporting coastal communities, sustaining coastal habitats and mitigating coastal hazards.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through research to better understand weather and climate-related events and to manage wisely the nation's coastal and marine resources.

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On the Internet:
NOAA - http://www.noaa.gov.
NOAA National Ocean Service - http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/.
NOAA Damage Assessment and Restoration Program: http://www.darp.noaa.gov/.