From: John Smestad Jr
To: MVN Environmental;
Subject: Concerning Coconut Beach - from the Archdiocese of New Orleans
Date: Thursday, May 14, 2009 5:05:02 AM

Mr. Owen,

I have learned yesterday that Coconut Beach Sand Volleyball Complex and Mickey Retif Playground are again being threatened by latest pump station plan of the Corps of Engineers. I am the Director of Youth Ministry for the Archdiocese of New Orleans, and in that capacity coordinate the largest charity volleyball tournament held at the complex, the "Slam N Jam" tournament which draws 3000 high school students and 80 volleyball teams from 24 area public, private, and parochial high schools (through their student councils) to raise money for summer camps for children with spina bifida, cystic fibrosis, and muscular dystrophy. Our tournament, now entering it's 14th year, provides almost half the funding for each of three camps. Coconut Beach is the only sand volleyball complex in Greater New Orleans, and should it cease to operate, our tournament will have no where to be held, and these charities will be very negatively impacted when that funding vanishes. I have made several media outlets, including WWL and WDSU, aware of the impact on these charities if Coconut Beach ceases to operate.

I have attended several public hearings over the last few years, including sessions with Corps representatives at St. Dominic, St. Paul's, and First Baptist Churches in Lakeview. Each time we as the public have gone through this process, we have been assured that Coconut Beach will be preserved, and yet, here we are again with another Corps plan that aims to eliminate the playground. New Orleans has too few recreational opportunities for teenagers and young adults as it is.

I know we need better flood protection; I am a resident of Lakeview who had 9 feet of water submerge his house. I am not someone sitting outside the Katrina flood zone who takes lightly advocating for a playground in the midst of flood-protection planning.

I do think, though, that the playground is an easy target for a land-taking. I am tired of rushing to the defense of Coconut Beach, being reassured that it will be spared, and then finding out a new plan issued with little public notice will again attempt to eliminate it.

I hope that the Corps of Engineers can be a bit more creative in resolving where to place the new pumping station, while preserving what few important community resources remain at West End, namely, Coconut Beach.

Thank you for your consideration.

John R. Smestad, Jr., Director
CYO/Youth & Young Adult Ministry Office
Archdiocese of New Orleans
105 Bonnabel Blvd
Metairie LA 70005
Phone 504-836-0551 ext. 23
Fax 504-836-0552

"I pray... that all may be one." John 17:20-21