

**Comite River Ecosystem Restoration  
Comments for Col. Thomas Julich  
July 10, 2001**

Thank you, \_\_\_\_\_  
(whoever introduces you)

Greetings and recognition (VIPs)

City of Baton Rouge

East Baton Rouge Parish

Recreation and Park Commission for East B.R. Parish

U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service

La. Department of Wildlife & Fisheries

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

La. Department of Environmental Quality

The Corps has had a presence in Louisiana for more than 200 years. We've been busy during that time with our navigation and flood control mission. It's only been in the last few decades that we have taken on our all-important third mission, that of environmental engineering.

We have made great strides in addressing the environmental needs of south Louisiana. Since 1976, we've been using material dredged from our waterways to create marsh habitat.

The district has played a major role in diverting fresh water from the Mississippi River into basins suffering from saltwater intrusion. We are at the forefront in our efforts to restore coastal Louisiana, partnering with other federal and state agencies on Breaux Act projects and, now, Coast 2050, a major, long-term holistic approach to restoring the state's coast.

I bring this to your attention because our environmental restoration efforts have been mainly focused on coastal Louisiana. I am proud to say that the Comite River Nature Park is the Corps first non-coastal restoration project.

The park's site originally hosted a river-forest system with freshwater lakes and bottomland hardwood. These features were destroyed when a portion of the 62.5-acre site was mined for soil in the 1980s. With help and guidance from our partners, we studied several options to determine the best method to restore the park.

The plan decided on is consistent with features of the Comite River Basin and provides the greatest amount of environmental benefits as well as the greatest amount of bio-diversity. It also provides for the greatest amount of recreational activities.

Together with our partners, we will recreate a bottomland hardwood and freshwater swamp wetland complex. To achieve that end, we will excavate for two freshwater lakes, one 2.5 acres, the other six acres with a two-acre island. We'll plant nearly 7,000 trees representing 17 native species, with some planted in naturally occurring groupings.

A few of the species include bald cypress, tupelo gum, cottonwood, river birch and red mulberry. Invasive species, such as the Chinese tallow, will be removed and controlled. Nearly half of the site is presently naturally forested and will remain in its natural state.

Restored habitats will provide benefits for many species of fish and wildlife, such as bream, largemouth bass, songbirds, wading birds, waterfowl, amphibians, reptiles and various mammals. The restoration will also help reconnect the existing wildlife corridor along the Comite River and improve the quality of the water that passes through this area into the river.

The public benefits almost immediately from ecosystem restoration projects. Walking trails, restrooms, an information booth and a parking lot will be constructed to allow for recreational uses such as bird watching, exercise walking, fishing and nature interpretation.

The project will also provide tremendous educational opportunities. Our children will have the chance to learn about their environment and, in turn, understand the importance of protecting and preserving it.

While structural projects are built with a specific design life, ecosystem restoration projects, protected from development, last forever. So the Comite River Nature Park is a long term investment that will provide dividends for our children's children to enjoy and appreciate.

It is that investment that we are recognizing today. The Comite River Nature Park is the result of synergy developed through successful partnerships among the participants here today.

Let's not stop here. The Corps plans to develop and is actively pursuing the opportunity to build more ecosystem restoration projects. We realize that the overall environmental health of this land depends on our investing today for our family's future.