

**Eastern Division Federal Lands Access Program
Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge
Orleans Parish, Louisiana
RPC Task No. EFL-BSNO; Award no. 693C732450004**

Project Description:

The Regional Planning Commission for Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, St. Tammany, and Tangipahoa Parishes (RPC), in partnership with the City of New Orleans (CNO), was awarded a grant in response to a proposal under the 2022 Louisiana Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) Call for Projects to develop a comprehensive Access Improvements Plan for the Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Project Background:

The Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge (hereinafter known as “the Refuge”) is the second largest urban wildlife refuge in the United States, consisting of over 27,000 acres of wetlands in the eastern portion of Orleans Parish. The refuge provides a habitat for a diverse range of wildlife (in particular, numerous species of migratory birds) along with potential recreation and sightseeing opportunities such as paddling and bank fishing. About 270,000 people visit the Refuge each year. The Refuge is traversed by Interstate 10, US Hwy 90 (Chef Menteur Highway), and US Hwy 11 (Ridgeway Blvd), which are the three primary roads providing access to the Refuge. Although public access to the refuge is provided at several locations (including a ridge trail and boardwalk accessible from US 90), recreational access to Bayou Sauvage is limited overall. The vast majority of the Refuge is accessible only by boat due to the limited number of developed trails, boardwalks, and other facilities which would provide access to recreation opportunities. The lack of developed walking and biking facilities along US 90 and US 11 limits access for non-motorized users.

Project Purpose:

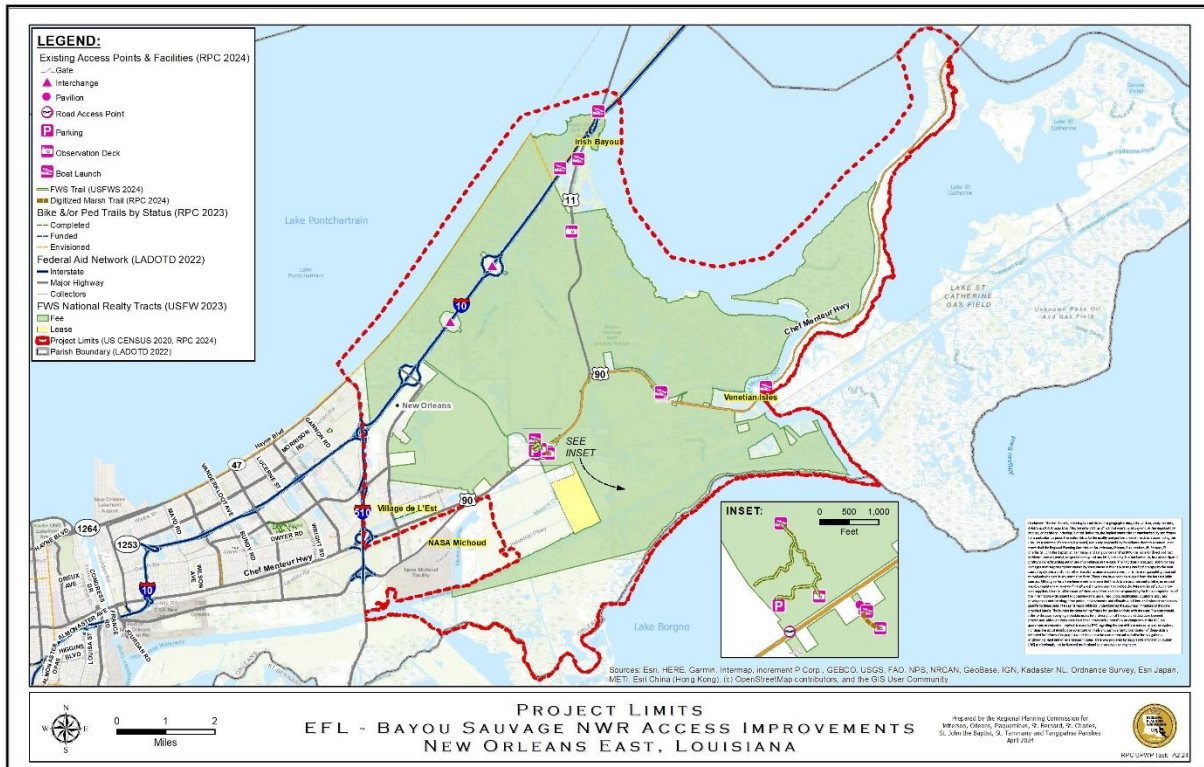
The purpose of the proposed project is to develop a comprehensive plan for transportation enhancements for the Refuge, located in the eastern portion of New Orleans (coterminous with Orleans Parish, Louisiana.) This plan will reference research and findings from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Urban Transportation Connections Study by Kimley Horn/BIHL ‘Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge Access Plan’ 2017. This plan will identify actions for improving recreation access to, and within, the Refuge for all users, with an emphasis on non-motorized facilities.

Project Need:

The proposed Bayou Sauvage Urban NWR Access Improvement Plan is intended to address longstanding physical and jurisdictional challenges in attracting more visitors to and through this urban National Wildlife Refuge. While the Refuge is less than one mile from adjacent residential neighborhoods like Village de L'Est and less than 12 miles from downtown New Orleans, access to specific points of interest are extremely limited from adjacent public roads. The most recognizable public access point is a trailhead along US 90 that is one mile beyond public bus service. With the recent addition of 2,300 acres to the Refuge, this trailhead now sits in the middle of the federal footprint. Access from the Lakefront, scheduled improvements for Lincoln Beach, adjacent City of New Orleans residential neighborhoods like Little Woods and Village de L'Est, and St. Tammany Parish are not distinguishable or easy to navigate without a car.

Currently, potential trail users have no other option but to use high speed state highways with limited shoulders or unmarked levee tops that are interrupted by Interstates, flood gates, railroads, and canals. Implementation of greenway and blueway trail facilities within the refuge has the potential to support recreation access priorities for the Refuge as identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), along with local and regional transportation goals, such as implementation of the City of New Orleans Bikeway Blueprint. This study is consistent with implementation goals of proposed regional trail networks, for walking, hiking, canoeing, kayaking, bicycling (and other possible uses that may arise in meetings) to link communities around Lake Pontchartrain. Specific needs addressed by this plan will include: 1) Improving multimodal access and safety to and through the Refuge; 2) Increasing multimodal connections to the adjacent existing public roadway network; 3) Increasing access for recreational activities such as fishing, hiking, bicycling, birding, kayaking, canoeing, and active learning; 4) Improving opportunities for economic revitalization; 5) Enhancing wildlife habitat and climate resilience, 6) Providing informational resources to understand the cultural history of the site, and 7) Promoting trails as resilient Infrastructure.

Project Geography/ Study Area:

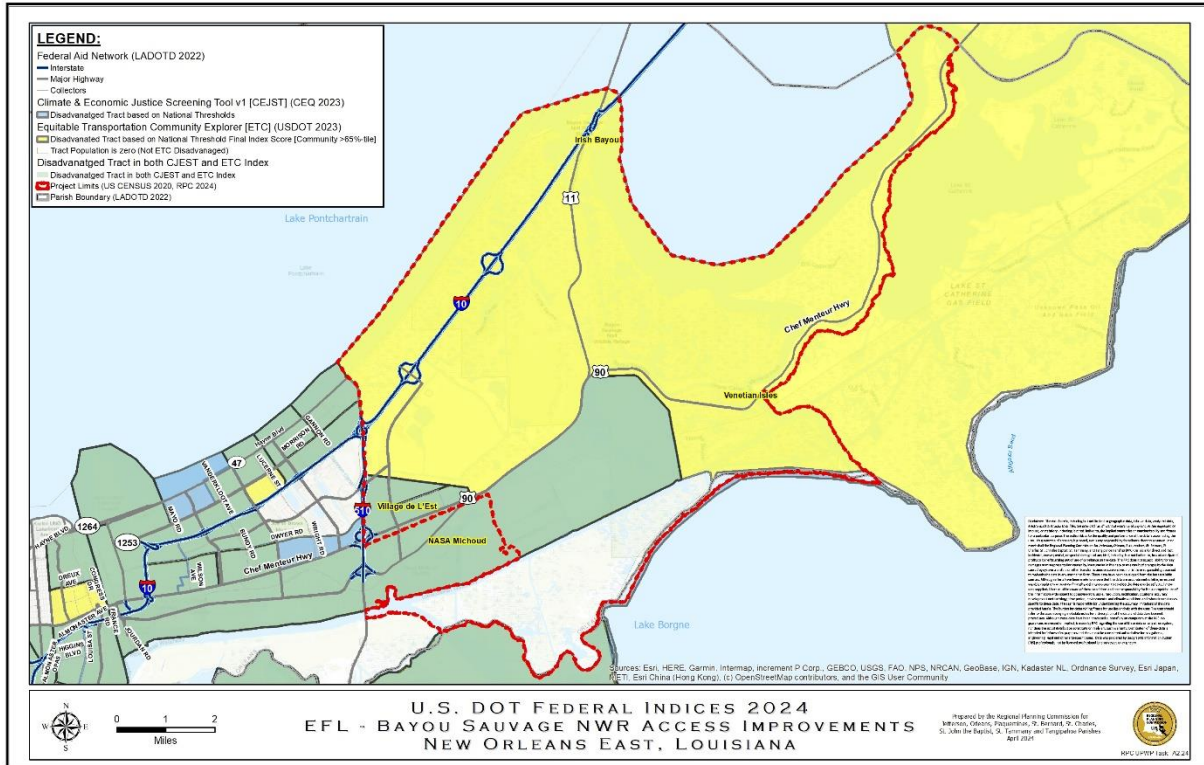


The project area geography for this analysis is the geography of the Refuge, including the levees and flood control structures that surround it, the highway network through and adjacent to it, US 90 and US 11, I-10, and LA 47, I-510, Michoud Blvd., the waterways of Bayou Sauvage, Chef Pass, Irish Bayou, and the Intercoastal Waterway, and the shorelines of Lake Borgne and Lake Pontchartrain.

The study area will include transportation facilities geographic areas, and neighborhoods adjacent to the Refuge, such as Village de L'Est/ Viavant, Oak Island, Venetian Isles, Little Woods, Eastover and Sherwood Forest, and the areas along US 90 in Lake St. Catherine, and US 11 (Ridgeway Blvd.)/ Irish Bayou.

Several neighborhoods that are adjacent to the Refuge are considered disadvantaged under criteria promulgated by the USDOT “Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool” (CEJST) <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/#3/33.47/-97.5>, and the recently updated “USDOT Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer”, <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/0920984aa80a4362b8778d779b090723/page/ETC-Explorer---National-Results/>

As such, special emphasis will be placed on enhancing access to the Refuge by underserved communities, consistent with Justice40 initiatives promulgated by the Federal Highway administration.



TASK 1: PROJECT MANAGEMENT TEAM & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

1A: Project Management Team

The consultants will assist RPC in establishing and supporting a Project Management Team (PMT) to guide the technical work effort and to review consultant work products. The PMT will consist of the RPC, Bayou Sauvage Project Leader from US Fish and Wildlife Service Southeast Louisiana Refuges, state and federal transportation coordinators, environmental and conservation expertise, the City of New Orleans Office of Resilience or Public Works, New Orleans City Planning, and other stakeholders who will bring expertise, contacts and support the work of this scope. The consultants will provide all necessary agendas, handouts and exhibits at least one week in advance of PMT meetings for RPC review and approval and prepare summary minutes of the meetings. Associated expert reference individuals will be formally invited pertaining to input for cultural and environmental considerations that arise.

The PMT will meet not more than four times during the study effort. These meetings may be in a virtual setting as determined by the PMT. The consultants will be responsible for organizing the virtual

meetings, establishing the list of invitees, send out the calendar invitations, and will identify and manage the particulars of the venue (i.e. meeting room reservations, equipment, Zoom, MS Teams, GoToMeeting, etc.) to be used.

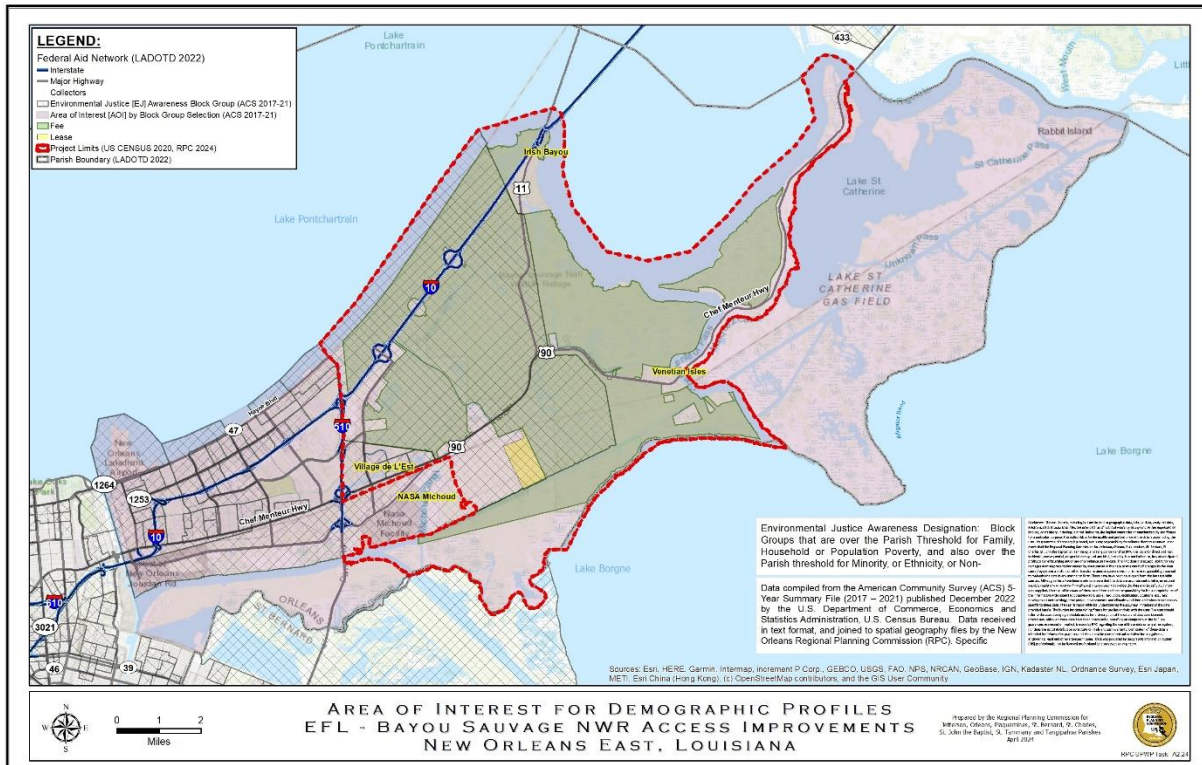
In addition, the consultants will assist RPC in the conduct of meetings (with other stakeholders in the area to discuss the project's purpose and need and project-related development opportunities and concerns, as appropriate. The RPC will initiate these contacts in consultation with USFW, FHWA, and the City of New Orleans, and the consultants will prepare summary meeting minutes for review and discussion with the PMT.

1A Deliverables:

Task products will include meeting agendas, handouts, presentations. Summary minutes and support graphics. Summary minutes will be made available to the RPC within ten (10) business days of all stakeholder and community meetings, with an original copy of the sign-in sheet (and/or full list of virtual attendees) for inclusion with the final report.

1B: Public Involvement

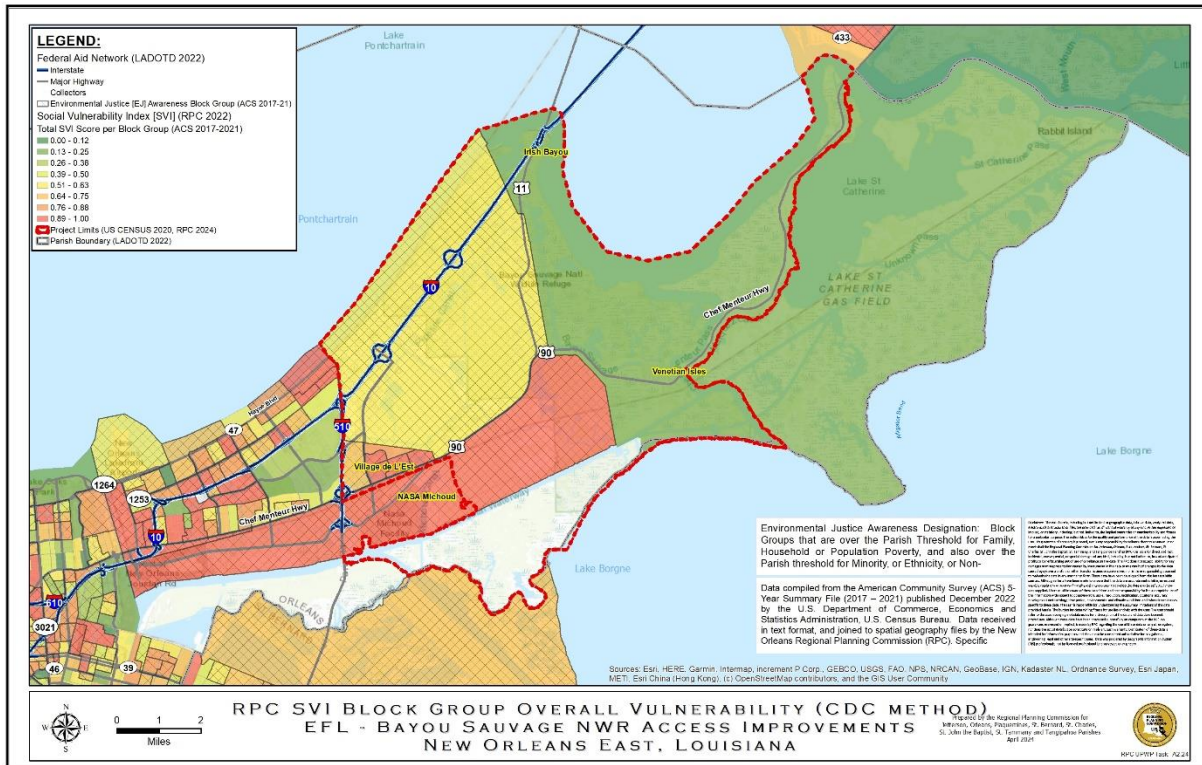
The consultants shall develop a public outreach plan for this project. The consultants shall be responsible for arranging and conducting up to three (3) community meetings at different phases of the project to solicit public input on the feasibility study. The timing and topics of discussion for the public meetings shall be determined by the PMT. These meetings may be conducted in an in-person or virtual setting as determined by RPC. Meetings shall be publicized and conducted in accordance with the RPC's Public Involvement Plan and Title VI Program. The consultants shall work with jurisdictions and organizations representing communities within the project area of interest (AOI) to distribute information about these community meetings or other opportunities for community input.



1B: Deliverables:

Task products will include a public participation plan to be reviewed and approved by the RPC. Said plan will be consistent with RPC's Public Participation Plan <https://www.norpc.org/public-participation-plan/> and Title VI program. <https://www.norpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/TITLE-VI-PLAN-2022-Website.pdf>

It will proactively solicit input from nearby communities relating to populations in poverty, racial and ethnic minorities, limited English proficiency households (LEP), disabled populations, school-age children K-12, elderly populations, households with no vehicles available, and disabled populations, as well as any other identified socially vulnerable populations following an Environmental Justice (EJ)/Title VI, analysis. The report should include an equity section noting the use of Title VI data in determining public meeting locations and outreach documents. Deliverables will include presentation materials for public meetings, summary minutes and overviews, and a summary equity report for inclusion in the final report. All data, tables and maps used in the equity section shall include citations for the source data (noting the source agency, date of the data as well as the date of the map or table) and the RPC disclaimer. RPC will supply demographic data to the consultant team. All presentation materials will be submitted to the RPC Responsible Charge/Project Manager no later than one week prior to the proposed meeting dates.



TASK 2: PROJECT TIMELINE & KICK-OFF MEETING

The consultants will prepare a draft project schedule including major milestones (PMT meetings, site visits, community meetings, draft reviews, final report submission, etc.). The timeline will be submitted at the project kick-off meeting that will include the prime consultant, all sub-consultants, USFW representatives, RPC, and CNO. The kick-off meeting will be organized by RPC and take place within three weeks of the Consultant’s Notice to Proceed.

Task 2 Deliverables:

Task product will include detailed project schedule with timeline and major milestones.

TASK 3: EXISTING CONDITIONS/SITE ASSESSMENT

Task 3A: Inventory of Site Access and Roadway Conditions

The consultants will work with RPC and the PMT to develop an inventory of existing site elements, including transportation access and conditions to and through the refuge. This will include levees, bayous, canals/outfalls, floodways, waterways, powerline corridors, highways, bridges, railroads, trails, and nesting sites (for either trail access or avoidance per NWR guidance which may include other wildlife concerns), in coordination with RPC and PMT. The inventory of infrastructure assets will determine how these assets enhance or impede access to the Refuge. This assessment is expected to include but is not limited to the following infrastructural assets within and adjacent to the Refuge:

Highways, Access Routes and Bridges:

I-10 including inactive interstate interchanges

US 11

I-10 Frontage Rd at Irish Bayou

US 90

LA 47

Michoud Blvd

Railroads:

Norfolk Southern

CSX

Outfall/ Drainage Canals:

New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board

City of New Orleans

Trails:

Existing and Proposed waterway trails, shared use, bike, and pedestrian

Levees:

Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority (East) and associated facilities

Utility Corridors:

Consultants will identify appropriate stakeholders and secure location data on the electrical and gas, water, sewerage, telephone, broadband networks and servitudes (or others that may be noted from the PMT) within the project area. If these data do not exist as geospatial datasets, RPC will digitize the information.

Task 3B: Transportation Network-Access Assessment

Consultants will assess the transportation network relating to highway and transit access to and through the Refuge (referencing previous USFWS Refuge Access Plan, 2017.) The primary East-West access route to and through the Refuge is US 90 (Chef Menteur Highway). Because US 90 is at grade with the exception of major bridges at the Inner Harbor Navigational Canal, Chef Pass, and the Rigolets, it is a preferred route for people connecting to and through the Refuge by walking or bicycling. The entrance to the Refuge Ridge Trail Boardwalk can be found on US 90. However, for the entire length of the Refuge, US 90 is a four-lane highway with narrow shoulders, but no side paths or other facilities for non-motorized users and a posted speed limit of 55 mph. approximately 765 crashes, averaging 109 crashes per year occurred on or near US 90 in the vicinity of the Refuge between 2014 and 2020, including 15 fatalities during this period.

Consultants will assess the transportation network connections to the Refuge along with safety concerns and barriers to access. This will include data collection as follows:

Traffic Counts: The consultants will collect seven day, twenty-four hour, bidirectional automated traffic counts/ vehicle classification counts at the following locations:

US 90 @ 500 feet west of Recovery Drive

US 90@ 500 feet east of US 11 (Powers Junction)

US 90 @ 100 feet East of Alba Rd.
US 90 East of Chef Pass Bridge (Lake St. Catherine)
US 90 at the Rigolets Bridge (west of LA 433)

US 11 North of US 90 to Floodgate
US 11 South of I-10 EB (offramp)
US 11 North of I-10 WB (offramp)

LA 47 (Paris Rd.) between Hayne Blvd and Morrison Rd.
LA 47 between Morrison Rd and I-10 Service Rd.
LA 47 between I-10 Service Rd. and I-10 EB on/offramps

Lake Forest Blvd. between I-510 and Michoud Blvd.

Michoud Blvd. north of Expedition Blvd.
Michoud Blvd. between Expedition Blvd and Lake Forest Blvd
Michoud Blvd. between Lake Forest Blvd and Dwyer Rd.
Michoud Blvd. between Dwyer Rd. and US 90

Traffic Count Collection Methodology is described in more detail in Appendix A.

Crash Data:

RPC will provide current 5-year multi-modal crash data for the following roadways in and adjacent to the Refuge:

US 90 (I-510 to Rigolets Bridge)
US 11 (US 90 to Lake Pontchartrain Bridge)
LA 47/ Paris Rd. (Hayne Blvd to I-10 Service Rds.)
Michoud Blvd (US 90 to I-10 Interchange)
Lake Forest Blvd. between I-510 and Michoud Blvd.

3C: Greenway/Bikeway/Blueway Linkages:

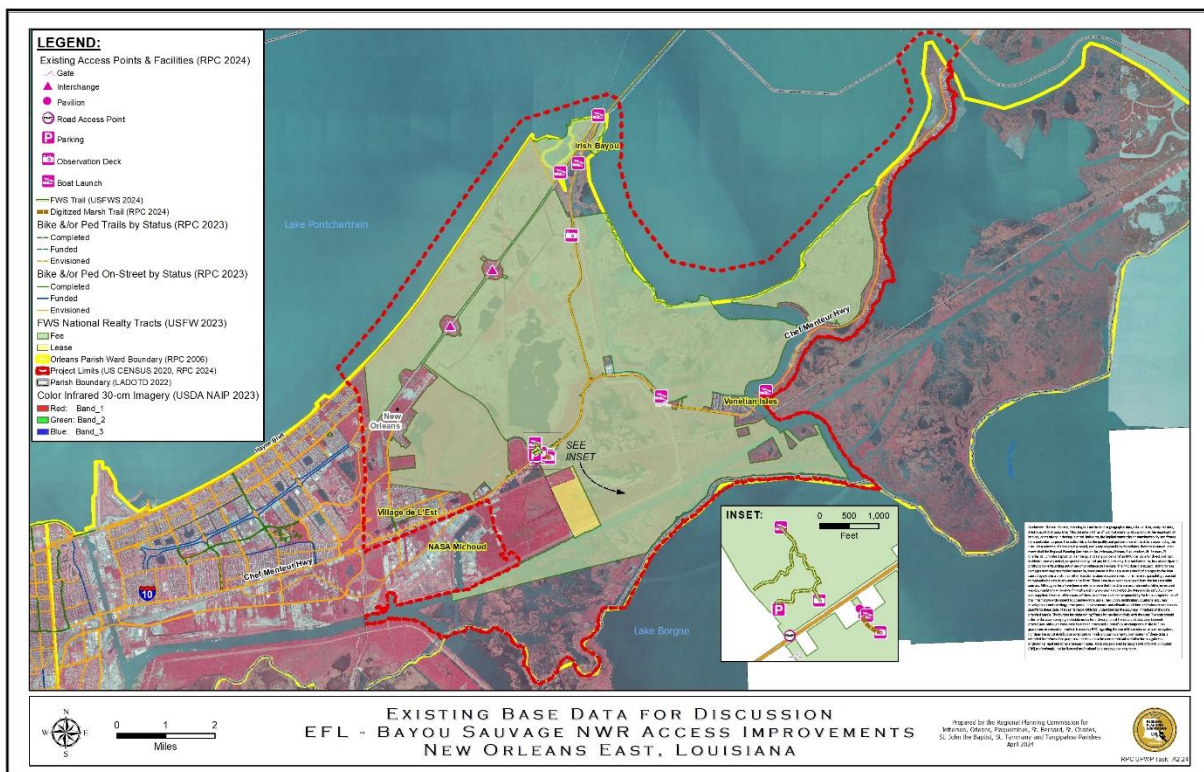
Consultants will use existing non-motorized planning efforts as context for active transportation connections to the Refuge. There are several existing planning efforts providing opportunities to incorporate Refuge access and regional linkages. The Louisiana Bootlace Trails Network, The rings Around the Lake, the City of New Orleans Bikeway Blueprint and its' Capital Improvement Plan, the RPC Active Transportation Improvements-New Orleans East I-10 Service Roads Land Use and Transportation Corridor Analysis Stage 0 Report, October 2023, and Connecting New Orleans East for Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety and Mobility Project recently funded through US DOT's Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Grant Program, and Lincoln Beach planning, to name a few. These and other studies focus on investments in populated areas along the perimeter of the Refuge. These will be researched and reviewed by the consultant team and used as reference and context for this effort.

Linkages to Identified Economic Development and Revitalization Initiatives:

The Refuge is uniquely located within the City of New Orleans corporate limits in an area called New Orleans East and is what most visitors see as they enter the City of New Orleans from the east along Interstate 10. It is also bordered by two major lakes (Lake Pontchartrain and Lake Borgne), as well as the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW), which make it accessible by boat. Because of the low-lying, swampy nature of the Refuge, the economic development benefits of the Refuge are tied to the ability of visitors to experience the Refuge using open water and dry land features. With the City's current \$15M investment into re-opening nearby Lincoln Beach (closed in the 1960's following desegregation), the current redevelopment of the former Six Flags site (closed after Hurricane Katrina in 2005) into a sports and shopping complex, and the creation of the Louisiana Bootlace Trail Network, the consultants will develop strategies and propose linkages that will provide access to these areas and otherwise enhance regional non-motorized access to them.

Linkages with other planned developments or proposed non-motorized facilities nearby and within the Refuge boundaries will be identified. Additional venues will be identified and opportunities for access for non-motorized recreation will be promulgated.

Task 3D: Identify Existing and Future Formal Key Points of interest Within the Refuge



Working with the Refuge personnel, consultants will review current plans by USF&W for site improvements or modifications planned for the Refuge. Consultants will document improvements and locate them geospatially and produce a site map as a graphic presentation for this purpose. Said map will include infrastructure assets described in Task 3A.

Task 3 (A, B, C, D) Deliverables:

Deliverables for Task 3 shall include an Existing Conditions Report that will encompass:

- *existing conditions for direct refuge access,*
- *non-motorized routes that exist or are planned or proposed nearby,*
- *roadway volumes and crash data on existing roadways that provide access into and through the Refuge.*
- *an assessment of other infrastructural assets in and near the refuge that may be modified to incorporate non-motorized access.*
- *and identification of potential non-motorized routes that would link identified redevelopment/reinvestment areas to a broader regional network of trails, waterway access and other non-motorized venues (such as inactive transportation interchanges, Lincoln Beach connections, or Village de L'Est connections).*

TASK 4: IDENTIFY ALTERNATIVES FOR FACILITIES THAT ENHANCE RECREATION ACCESS WITHIN AND TO THE REFUGE

Using the information developed in the Existing Conditions Report of Task 3, the consultants will develop feasible alternatives and concept projects.

4A: Enhance Access

Project alternatives shall enhance access into and within the Refuge. Consultants will work with USFW, RPC, and CNO personnel to develop concepts for stakeholder review. Alternatives developed will be categorized based on scale, cost, and complexity for prioritization during stakeholder review.

4B: Enhance Resilience

Alternatives will maximize the use of existing roadways, levees, and waterways to the extent possible. Alternatives developed will focus on retrofit upgrades that would result in a state of good repair to levees, bridges, and roadways. The intent of these upgrades would be to improve recreational and parking access and not undermine the functions of the Refuge system and its infrastructure. Consultants will explore specific alternatives where additional space is needed to facilitate trails along highways, parking lots at trail heads, shade structures, wildlife viewing areas, educational resources, and the protection of natural, biological, cultural, historical, and/or scenic resources as needed.

4C: Other Environmental and Cultural Resources

Potential impacts to environmental or cultural resources will be identified so that appropriate mechanisms for avoidance, minimization, and mitigation along with costs can be determined. Consultants shall conduct a search of past NEPA documents, Section 106 reviews and consult regulatory databases and websites for actions and cases within ¼ mile to proposed improvements.

4D: Development of Performance Measures

Consultants will research and promulgate recommended best practices in developing performance measures for gauging sustainability and environmental impacts of projects developed in Task 4A. Examples may include quantification measures, such as the number of visitors and mode of transportation (including buses) accessing the Refuge. Coordination with Refuge administration will aid

in determining and reporting current visitor activities. Said measures will be developed and submitted for review to the PMT. Consultants will work collaboratively with RPC staff to develop these standards.

Task 4 (A-D) Deliverables:

Deliverables for this task will include projects and initiatives vetted by RPC and the PMT that enhance access into and within the refuge. Projects and initiatives promulgated under this task:

- *Will place an emphasis on enhancing access by underserved and overburdened communities as defined by the U.S. DOT's "Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)," and "Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer"*
- *Will include applicable resilience features for each.*
- *Will include a methodology for the development of performance measures that will gauge sustainability and environmental impacts.*

TASK 5: DEVELOPMENT OF PRELIMINARY DESIGNS AND COST ESTIMATES FOR PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

Using the information developed in Task 4 and with approval from RPC, the consultants will develop more detailed concept designs for improvements identified in the previous task. Further, the consultants will develop a preliminary prioritized list of projects. The consultants will provide the PMT and the final stakeholder meeting with a prioritized list of both short- and long-term transportation deficiencies, resilience recommendations and related capital improvements for each alternative noting order of magnitude estimated costs.

Task 5 Deliverables:

Deliverables will include a report on Task 5 with accompanying designs.

Task 6: Funding Review and Functional Responsibilities

Based on the project and costs identified in Task 5, the consultants will work with USFW, RPC, and CNO to identify funding sources for implementation. It is anticipated that projects accessing the Refuge from the highway network or those outside the physical boundaries of the park would require funding resources not eligible under USFW funding guidelines.

As such, and consistent with project implementation guidelines from the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LA DOTD), the consultants will prepare "MPO Stage 0 Checklists" (ref. LA DOTD Program Development and Project Delivery System Manual, Chapter 4: Stage 0 Standard Operating Procedure, Checklist for MPO Stage 0 - Preliminary Scope and Budget Worksheet, and Stage 0 Environmental Checklist) for no more than three conceptual projects as directed by the PMT.

Task 6 Deliverables:

Task 6 Deliverables will consist of accomplishing the "MPO Stage 0 checklists (ref. LA DOTD Program Development and Project Delivery System Manual, Chapter 4: Stage 0 Standard Operating Procedure, Checklist for MPO Stage 0-Preliminary Scope and Budget Worksheet, and Stage 0 Environmental Checklist) for no more than three conceptual projects as directed by the PMT.

TASK 7: DRAFT REVIEW

A draft of the report (five copies) with supporting documentation, and a digital version for editing, will be submitted to the RPC for distribution to the PMT for review by, at the latest, 80% of project billing completion. Pending approval of the draft, RPC may, at its discretion, require the consultants to deliver hard copies to PMT members for their review.

The draft report will include, but not limited to a draft purpose and need for the projects, existing traffic conditions, forecasted traffic conditions, proposed highway improvements, including near term recommendations as well as longer term traffic management solutions, conceptual right of way needs, utility relocations, and environmental concerns and all elements through Task 6 as determined by RPC

Task 7 Deliverable:

Development and circulation of five printed reports and access to an editable digital report for PMT review and comment.

TASK 8: FINAL DELIVERABLES

Following review and approval of the draft submission, the consultants will provide RPC with ten (10) bound copies of the Final Federal Lands Access Program for Bayou Sauvage Study, documenting the information and analysis described above. Ten printed copies of the report, and ten copies on USB drives in electronic format (pdf including all maps and visualizations) will be submitted by the consultants to RPC for distribution.

Task 8 Deliverable:

Final report deliverables will include ten bound and electronic copies of the study noted in Task 8 above, and additionally all supporting data in table and GIS format, pdf maps, and other documentation.

STUDY TIMELINE: Ten Months

BUDGET: \$

Appendix A: Traffic Count Methodology

Traffic counts will be conducted at the locations specified in Section 3B of this scope of work.

Traffic data collection will adhere to the following provisions:

- 1) Traffic counts shall not be conducted during holidays, annual festivals, Mardi Gras, or other abnormal traffic/inclement weather conditions. School traffic factors into the count data; therefore, the counts shall take place when school is in session, unless otherwise approved by RPC.
- 2) Consultant must adhere to the provisions of 2016 LA DOTD Traffic Monitoring Manual, Chapter 4.0: Site Selection for Road Tube Placement and the FHWA 2016 Traffic Monitoring Guide (at least Chapter 3).
- 3) The consultant must utilize a raw traffic data file format that is compatible with the Traffic Server operated by the DOTD and certified as a current version of traffic data management software. A list of compatible file formats may be obtained from the RPC or DOTD.
- 4) Traffic counts will be collected at 15 minute intervals. Data delivery will include 15 minute interval counts, peak hour counts, and average daily traffic counts
- 5) Vehicle classification counts will be collected at 15 minute intervals. Delivery will include 15 minute interval counts, total class counts, and percentage of each vehicle type as defined by FHWA Traffic Monitoring Guide (TMG).
- 6) For both volume and vehicle classification counts: Data provided shall include the latitude and longitude coordinates of the site obtained by global positioning system (GPS) technology and recorded during the monitoring session at each site designated and identified by a station number. Data must be collected for each direction of travel and the nominal traffic volume data will be reported by direction (North/South or East/West). Sites located on divided highways and other locations agreed to in advance will require two installations, one for each direction of traffic. For each of these sites, the monitoring sessions will be simultaneous.
- 7) A detailed description of the type of sensors including the name and manufacturer of the traffic monitoring equipment to be used is to be provided to RPC.
- 8) The consultant will adhere to a Quality Assurance /Quality Control program to reasonably assure the collecting and reporting of accurate and quality traffic data. The consultant must also reasonably assure good quality data and minimally adhere to the TMG standards and guidelines required for collecting and reporting traffic monitoring data.

The consultant will be responsible for the organization, processing, and delivery of the traffic data. Data will be provided to the RPC in the following formats:

1. A Microsoft Excel compatible (.xls or .csv) spreadsheet summarizing average daily traffic, based on a template to be provided by RPC. The spreadsheet must include latitude and longitude of the location of each count with projection information, including datum unit of measure and an assigned unique ID; AND

2. An ESRI compatible geographic file (shapefile or feature class) summarizing average daily traffic, based on a template to be provided by the RPC which will include count location unique ID (LOCAL_ID or IntID) and location description.
3. Raw traffic data files in a format that is compatible with the most current traffic data management software operated by the LA DOTD (currently MS2 Traffic Count Database System (TCDS)). A list of compatible file formats for LA DOTD upload may be obtained here: <https://docs.ms2soft.com/docs/ms2-help-data-import>

Duration: 9 months from Notice to Proceed.