

2026 Regular Session

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 144

BY SENATOR WHEAT

WATER/WATERWAYS. Establishes the Upper Pontchartrain Basin Task Force, provides for an assessment of the basin, and requests a suspension of approving certain permits.

A RESOLUTION

To establish the Upper Pontchartrain Basin Task Force; to urge and request the Water Institute to conduct a comprehensive scientific assessment of the basin; to urge and request the governor and state agencies to suspend permitting for certain industrial activities pending completion of the assessment; to provide for exceptions; and to provide for related matters.

WHEREAS, the Upper Pontchartrain Basin, including Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Maurepas, their tributaries, wetlands, and cypress-tupelo swamps, represents one of Louisiana's most valuable and environmentally sensitive estuarine ecosystems, supporting fisheries, wildlife habitat, flood protection, navigation, recreation, and cultural heritage; and

WHEREAS, the basin serves as a natural buffer for surrounding parishes, including Livingston, Tangipahoa, St. John the Baptist, St. Tammany, and Orleans, by providing storm surge protection, water filtration, and critical ecological balance; and

WHEREAS, over many decades the basin has been subjected to significant environmental stressors, including large-scale cypress deforestation, saltwater intrusion, storm damage, shell dredging operations, oil and gas exploration, industrialization, urbanization, and municipal and household runoff; and

WHEREAS, numerous state and federal actions have previously recognized the

1 environmental sensitivity of the basin, including litigation and environmental review relating  
2 to shell dredging operations, restrictions on oil and gas activity in portions of Lake  
3 Pontchartrain, prohibitions on shrimp trawling in Lake Maurepas, coastal restoration  
4 initiatives, levee and flood protection projects, and implementation of the Lake Maurepas  
5 Freshwater Diversion Project; and

6 WHEREAS, local governing authorities and residents throughout the region have  
7 expressed increasing concern regarding the cumulative environmental impacts associated  
8 with existing and proposed industrial activity in the basin; and

9 WHEREAS, proposals for additional large-scale industrial activity, including but not  
10 limited to energy generation facilities and associated infrastructure, raise significant  
11 questions concerning long-term impacts on fisheries, wetlands, wildlife habitat, hydrology,  
12 water quality, storm resilience, and the overall ecological integrity of the basin; and

13 WHEREAS, the cumulative and interacting effects of multiple industrial activities  
14 may not be adequately evaluated through isolated project-by-project permitting decisions;  
15 and

16 WHEREAS, The Water Institute is an independent nonprofit research organization  
17 with expertise in coastal science, hydrology, watershed management, climate resilience,  
18 environmental monitoring, infrastructure, and flood risk management.

19 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana  
20 hereby establishes the Upper Pontchartrain Basin Task Force, hereinafter referred to as the  
21 "task force", to receive the study and updates of the assessment conducted by the Water  
22 Institute as provided herein, review its findings, and make recommendations concerning the  
23 future protection, management, permitting, restoration, and sustainable use of the basin.

24 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the task force shall be composed of the  
25 following members:

26 (1) Two members of the Senate appointed by the president of the Senate.

27 (2) Two members of the House of Representatives appointed by the speaker of the  
28 House of Representatives.

29 (3) The secretary of the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, or his  
30 designee.

1           (4) The secretary of the Louisiana Department of Energy and Natural Resources, or  
2 his designee.

3           (5) The secretary of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, or his  
4 designee.

5           (6) The chairman of the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, or his  
6 designee.

7           (7) The president and CEO of The Water Institute, or his designee.

8           (8) The executive director of the Pontchartrain Conservancy, or his designee.

9           (9) One representative from each of the following parishes appointed by their  
10 respective governing authority:

11           (a) Jefferson Parish.

12           (b) Livingston Parish.

13           (c) Orleans Parish.

14           (d) St. Charles Parish.

15           (e) St. Tammany Parish.

16           (f) Tangipohoa Parish.

17           BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the members of the task force shall serve  
18 without compensation, except per diem or expenses reimbursement to which they may be  
19 individually entitled as members of their constituent organizations.

20           BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a majority of the task force shall constitute a  
21 quorum for the transaction of business and all official actions of the task force shall require  
22 the affirmative vote of a majority of the members.

23           BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the task force shall convene for its first meeting at  
24 the call of secretary of the Department of Conservation and Energy at which meeting the  
25 members shall elect a chairman and any other officer the task force may deem appropriate.

26           BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of Conservation and Energy  
27 shall provide staff support to the task force and the task force may request additional support  
28 from the staff of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources.

29           BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the task force may meet as often as necessary  
30 and shall meet upon submission of updates and the final report of the assessment conducted

1 by the Water Institute and shall submit recommendations on or before March 1, 2029, to the  
2 legislature and the governor concerning any statutory, regulatory, administrative, or funding  
3 actions necessary to protect the long-term sustainability of the Upper Pontchartrain Basin.

4 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the task force shall terminate on the date of the  
5 submission of its recommendations or March 1, 2029, whichever occurs first.

6 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana does  
7 hereby urge and request The Water Institute to conduct a comprehensive scientific  
8 assessment of the Upper Pontchartrain Basin in collaboration with and utilizing the  
9 expertise, data, monitoring resources, and institutional knowledge of the Pontchartrain  
10 Conservancy and Southeastern Louisiana University in the design and execution of the  
11 assessment.

12 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Water Institute may collaborate with federal,  
13 state, and local agencies as appropriate to include but not be limited to the Coastal Protection  
14 and Restoration Authority, the Department of Environmental Quality, the Department of  
15 Conservation and Energy, the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the United States  
16 Environmental Protection Agency, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, and  
17 Louisiana State University.

18 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the assessment shall examine, at a minimum,  
19 all of the following:

20 (1) The cumulative impacts of existing and proposed industrial activities within the  
21 basin.

22 (2) Hydrological and ecological thresholds of the basin.

23 (3) Risks to fisheries, wildlife, wetlands, water quality, benthic communities, and  
24 aquifers.

25 (4) The composition and potential disturbance of lake-bottom sediments, including  
26 contaminants and per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances.

27 (5) Risks associated with abandoned oil and gas wells and existing pipeline  
28 concentrations.

29 (6) Potential seismic and subsidence-related concerns.

30 (7) Impacts on coastal restoration, freshwater diversion, hurricane protection, flood

1 mitigation, and resilience projects.

2 (8) The interaction of industrial activity with sea-level rise, saltwater intrusion, storm  
3 surge, and water runoff.

4 (9) Water sampling and aquatic species testing with consideration and integration of  
5 existing studies, sampling programs, and scientific data currently being conducted and  
6 compiled by Southeastern Louisiana University and Pontchartrain Conservancy.

7 (10) Emergency response and evacuation considerations.

8 (11) Economic resilience and property value impacts.

9 (12) Comparative environmental impacts associated with locating industrial activity  
10 within the basin versus alternative locations outside sensitive estuarine systems.

11 (13) The consequences of wind-energy infrastructure.

12 (14) The long-term sustainability of the basin under increased industrialization.

13 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the assessment shall reference and build upon  
14 prior scientific evaluations of the Upper Pontchartrain Basin, including multidisciplinary  
15 studies conducted by the United States Geological Survey, and shall utilize the best available  
16 science and meaningful public and stakeholder input.

17 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that The Water Institute shall submit progress reports  
18 to the task force and the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana not less than twice annually  
19 and shall submit a final report, including findings and recommendations, on or before July  
20 1, 2028.

21 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana does  
22 hereby urge and request the governor, state agencies, and political subdivisions to suspend  
23 the approval or advancement of permits for new or expanded industrial activities within the  
24 Upper Pontchartrain Basin, for which a state or federal permits have been applied for or  
25 pending, or are anticipated but not yet finalized, until submission of the comprehensive  
26 scientific assessment to the task force and the public has an opportunity to review the  
27 findings.

28 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this request regarding permits shall not apply  
29 to any of the following exceptions, provided such activities are not components of, or  
30 preparatory to, new or expanded industrial development:

