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COMMUNIQUE' OF COOPERATION CALLS FOR DELTAS TO UNITE

World must understand its deltas are key to future sustainability of ecology, economies, cultures

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam – Participants at DELTAS2013VIETNAM, an international dialogue sponsored by the America's WETLAND Foundation of Louisiana, Viet Nam National University and the government of the Netherlands, today approved a Communiqué affirming the need for cooperation among peoples to save the world's great deltas.

While expert presentations informed the discussions, the heart of the conference took place in charrettes over a period of three days, with U.S., Dutch and Vietnamese facilitators guiding each group. The charrettes generated an intense exchange of ideas as participants discussed challenges and opportunities common to planet's deltas, more than 10 of which were represented at conference.

Jerome Zeringue, executive director of the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, stressed the need for a comprehensive approach to planning restoration and protection efforts. "Stakeholders was crucial to the state of Louisiana's creation of a master plan for coastal protection and restoration. Ours is a working coast, and the communities whose economic activities benefit the entire United States must have access to information to help inform decision making," Zeringue said. "We are pleased this communiqué puts emphasis on the role of the communities."

Stijn Koole, a landscape architect with Bosch-Slabbers in the Netherlands also emphasized a comprehensize approach. "In our charrette, we recognized the need to think in "systems" as we search of solutions. We came up with a concept called IDEA – Identification - or knowing what you have, Dynamism - or going with the flow, Education – learning that reaches out locally, upstream and globally, and Adaptation - which means taking action now!"

The importance of upstream/downstream connections was stressed throughout the dialogues according to Karen Gautreaux, government liaison for the Louisiana chapter of The Nature Conservancy. "We must improve information and data sharing and keep these newfound connections strong as we continue to share lessons learned. The need to identify and generate mechanisms to finance delta sustainability was a recurring theme in our conversations," she said.

Doug Meffert, who directs efforts of the Louisiana chapter of the National Audubon Society, said that local communities are engaged in communicating what is needed to sustain the Mekong, but that does not always translate into action, and their input is key to the decision-making process. Meffert's charrette co-leader, Rien Dam of the Dutch organization Deltares said, "The Mekong Delta is extraordinarily vulnerable, and we need to understand how people living and working here and in all deltas worldwide can adapt to rapid change. I can say we had a real dialogue!"

Denise Reed, chief scientist at The Water Institute of the Gulf agreed. “We talked about the future first – what it looks like and how to get there. We learned the present generation of Vietnamese were taught that the Mekong Delta - the ‘golden forest, silver ocean’ – will always be there to provide for them. Our discussions made it evident they would not teach their children the same thing – that the delta is in real jeopardy of being lost.

Dr. Donald Boesch, president of the Center for Environmental Science at the University of Maryland, said, “The economy of Vietnam is changing and we must reconcile the need to harmonize this development with the needs of the ecosystem. There is an enormous challenge to help people understand the world in which they live. Climate change is the real game changer, and integrating the planning of key factors like agriculture and transportation is critical.”

Robert Twilley, director of Louisiana Sea Grant, said, “Along with climate change and changes in land use, the extremes of drought, flood and lack of fresh water will require adaptive strategies. The presence and absence of salt became a focal point of our discussions.”

The Communique’ of Cooperation will be presented by an official delegation of conference participants to the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Hanoi.

At the conclusion of the conference, R. King Milling, chair of the America’s WETLAND Foundation (AWF), presented the Foundation’s Lifetime Achievement Award to Professor Dr. Le Quang Minh, Vice President of Viet Nam National University in Ho Chi Minh City. Dr. Minh has spent most of his career in higher education working on issues of sustainability and was instrumental in the organization of DELTAS2013VIETNAM. After participating in the first World Delta Dialogues hosted by AWF in New Orleans in 2010, Dr. Minh offered Ho Chi Minh City as the site of the next dialogues to focus on similarities of the Mekong and Mississippi Deltas, and to establish a continuing exchange of ideas and technology as both deltas and their many counterparts across the globe seek sustainable solutions.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Rights free photographs, video resources, participant quotes and news releases are available on your computer at: <http://cddtest.com/deltas2013/index.html>

Attached is the program for DELTAS2013VIETNAM. Please arrange interviews or pose questions through the following contact:

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The America’s WETLAND Foundation manages the largest, most comprehensive public education campaign in Louisiana’s history, raising awareness of the impact of Louisiana’s wetland loss on the state nation and world. DELTAS2013VIETNAM is a unique gathering of global representatives from the many sectors and political circles that converge in watershed management, especially in the intricate trans-boundary dynamics of the Mekong. International delegates will discuss solutions to some of the most acute challenges facing Vietnam and its delta, the broader Mekong River system, and major deltas and watersheds worldwide. For more information visit www.americaswetland.com and www.deltas2013.org.