
P. O. Box 106
Convent, Louisiana 70723
president@stjamesla.com

Parish of St. James

Phone: (225) 562-2260
FAX: (225) 562-2279
TDD: (225) 562-8500



Peter A. Dufresne
Parish President

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MEDIA CONTACT:
Contact: Amber Shepard

Email: amber.shepard@stjamesparishla.gov
Phone: (225) 562-2336

ST. JAMES EVALUATES WEST BANK DRAINAGE STATUS

St. James Parish President Pete Dufresne met with a project engineer from T. Baker Smith on Thursday, February 6, 2020 to obtain a project status update on the dredging of Bayou Verret and Little Bayou Verret located near Highway 3127 in St. James Parish.

In March of 2018, St. James, Assumption, and Ascension Parishes agreed to partner with the Lafourche Basin Levee District to dredge these bayous as well as Bayou Napoleon in Ascension Parish. "This project not only increases drainage capacity but restores the original flow of water within the natural boundaries of the watershed" Dufresne said.

The source of this water shed begins at Point Houmas and flows through St. James Parish to Lake Des Allemands. Due to heavy silting and vegetation in one area of the watershed, flow is diverted upstream on Little Bayou Verret, then forms a whirlpool at the St. James Canal until it can continue downstream to the lake.

One of the key factors that initiated this project was the flash flooding event of 2014 that inundated areas of Donaldsonville, Abend, and commercial structures near Highway 70 at the foot of the Sunshine Bridge. Elected and public officials visited the dredging work site on Friday, February 7, 2020 and received a tour from Dennis Hymel, Jr. of T. Baker Smith.

In attendance was Rick Webre, St. James Parish Director of Operations. "I vividly recall the flooding event of 2014. This event resulted in myself and my counterparts to begin proposing that local flood control projects address the natural boundaries of a watershed and not jurisdictional borders. This project definitely fits that description as well as the goals and objectives of the new Louisiana Watershed Initiative," Webre said.

St. James Parish Government works together with community, business, industry, and agriculture to provide resources and services to improve our quality of life.

Parish President Pete Dufresne stated that he appreciates the efforts of the St. James Parish state legislative delegation. “I want to thank Senator Ed Price and Representative Ken Brass for their efforts in obtaining funding for this important major drainage project,” he said.

Rick Webre wants to continue the great working relationship that he has had with the levee district. “I look forward to enhancing the working relationship that I have built with the Lafourche Basin Levee District and want to personally thank Donald Henry, Executive Director, Ivy Chauvin, Assistant Director, and the employees of the Lafourche Basin Levee District for their efforts in providing the labor, equipment, and material that is so critical to the success of this project” Webre said. The St. James Parish Department of Operations is responsible for contracting and maintaining the engineering services for the Bayou Verret project as well as invoicing other jurisdictions involved in this endeavor.

In addition to the Bayou Verret project, T. Baker Smith is involved in a major drainage project that addresses the deficiencies identified in the M2 and Lateral 4 canals located between Airline Highway and Highway 3125 on the east bank of St. James Parish. Also, Burk-Kleinpeter and Command Construction will begin mobilizing this week to initiate a major drainage project along the south shoulder of Highway 3125 from Highway 642 in Grand Point to Airline Ave. in Gramercy.

Parish President Dufresne asks for patience from residents while this important drainage project is completed. “Drainage and flood control in St. James Parish is one of my top priorities. I consider this so important that I have declared a state of emergency to allow in-house parish crews to apply immediate action that restores flow of water from inner drainage channels and ditches to the major canals on both the east and west bank of the parish” Dufresne said.

Rick Webre believes that a combination of in-house crews addressing inner drainage channels, and contractors improving major laterals and canals will be the most efficient method to obtain the needed flash flooding prevention results. “This project will be my first opportunity to identify gaps in what we say we can do and what we can actually do on the ground. My boss [Dufresne] has given me his full support to accomplish this, and I have confidence that our parish crews can complete it. After meeting with our crews, they informed me that this type of drainage work has been completed with in-house crews for decades in St. James Parish. It’s my job to provide them with the resources and guidance that they need to do their job,” Webre said.

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