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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Galveston Bay Foundation Calls for Answers to Questions Regarding Potential Environmental Impacts of Proposed Coastal Barrier Project

Houston, TX – October 26, 2018 – The Draft Environmental Impact Statement issued today by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) for the proposed coastal barrier discusses potential environmental impacts from such a structure but does not adequately address the potential impacts to Galveston Bay’s ecological health and the continued productivity of its commercial and recreational fisheries.

The nearly one-third constriction of water flow into and out of Galveston Bay that will occur from the proposed floodgate between Galveston Island and Bolivar Peninsula may lead to reduction in the amount of Gulf water flowing into the Bay, a significant decrease in tidal height ranges, and a substantial increase to water velocities at the pass. This may result in changes to the amount of sediment available to the Bay’s wetlands, lower salinities in times of abundant rainfall, higher salinities in time of drought that can affect populations of fish and shellfish, and less natural flushing of the Bay which can lead to increased pollutant concentrations. Critically, a substantial increase to water velocities at Bolivar Roads may severely impact the movement of fish, shrimp and crab between the Bay and the Gulf, which could impede their life cycles and prevent them from growing into the seafood that we like to eat and to whom so many depend upon for recreation and livelihoods.

Decision-makers and the public should understand the true benefits and costs of such a massive structure before moving forward. We expect the Corps to address this lack of information as part of its efforts in finishing the five-and-a-half-yearlong study.

Furthermore, the Corps should continue to explore the development of timelier and less costly alternatives to the Corps’ proposed \$14-20 billion Coastal Barrier.

Given today’s federal funding climate and the huge cost of the Coastal Barrier, it is not clear that funding at that level will ever be appropriated to build the full project. In addition, it is not clear who will bear the estimated annual maintenance costs of \$130 million. Even if the funding is appropriated for construction, it will take at the very least another 10-15 years before the

project is completed due to size of the project and the eminent domain proceedings that will be needed to condemn land for the project and to build the structures. It is important that we not simply wait to see how this process develops over the next ten or more years, but that we act now to protect our Bay.

The most significant driver of a coastal spine is to protect industry along the Houston Ship Channel. We should ensure that industry is as protected and prepared as possible now for a hurricane to prevent spills of petroleum and petrochemicals into Galveston Bay which could spell disaster for its recreational and commercial fisheries. All plants should have a hurricane plan in place and should look at improving their own existing protection or levees.

Further, we should not abandon the idea of building a more affordable flood gate at the upper end of Galveston Bay or in the mid-Bay area. Such structures could provide needed protection now while we consider if the proposed Coastal Barrier is the right option for our area, taking into account all benefits and costs, including environmental costs.

We should get past the idea that this is an all or nothing proposition. And let's continue to look at complementary protection measures that can be taken in the short-term to protect people, infrastructure and the Bay now, including non-structural solutions such as sustainable planning and development and restoration of beaches, dunes, wetlands, and oyster reefs.

About the Galveston Bay Foundation

Established in 1987, the Galveston Bay Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Its mission is to preserve and enhance Galveston Bay as a healthy and productive place for generations to come. It implements diverse programs in land preservation, habitat restoration, water quality and quantity, youth education, and advocacy. For further information, contact the Foundation at (281) 332-3381, visit www.galvbay.org, like us on Facebook, or follow us on twitter @GBayFoundation

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