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DEQ announces survey of Vermilion-Teche watershed

BATON ROUGE – The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality has announced that the Vermilion-Teche watershed is undergoing a survey of all permitted and unpermitted discharges into the bayou. The survey is part of an ongoing pilot project under the Louisiana Clean Waters Program, which is the state’s watershed-based approach to ensuring that all water bodies in Louisiana meet their designated uses.

Through an evaluation of Louisiana’s water bodies, the Vermilion-Teche was found to be threatened by increased development and increased discharges in and around the bayou. It is one of many projects being undertaken by DEQ in order to raise public and industry awareness about the water quality in the state’s waterways so they can get up to par with environmental requirements.

“It is important for us to conduct a detailed survey of this watershed, as the waterway and some of its tributaries are currently impaired for primary contact recreation and fish and wildlife propagation,” said Ray Clement, Regional Manager of DEQ’s Acadiana Regional Office. “Our focus is to locate and document all discharges into the bayou for evaluation to ensure that they meet environmental standards. So far, we have discovered that approximately 40 percent of the discharging facilities into the bayou are unpermitted. By working with other state agencies, local governments and citizens, we can spread the word of the importance of maintaining these watersheds as safe and productive recreational sources.”

Though many facilities discharging into the bayou may have a permit with the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, additional steps are required from DEQ to ensure those sewer systems are correctly operating under the state and federal effluent discharge regulations.

“During the course of past watershed inspections, we have discovered many people did not know there was a need for a water discharge permit,” said DEQ Secretary Peggy Hatch. “It’s been a goal of this administration to be more than just a regulatory agency. The best path to a better environment is to add education and public awareness to the regulatory arms already in place. These watershed sweeps are important because they help inform the public as well as assist the department in gathering environmental data.”

DEQ’s 2010 Louisiana Water Quality Inventory: Integrated Report reports data showing improved water quality. This report used data from Jan. 1, 2006, to Sept. 30, 2009. The data shows that for the fifth consecutive Integrative Reporting cycle, Louisiana’s water quality has shown incremental improvements. Watershed surveys are one important way to help the state continue this trend of environmental improvement.