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Vegetating the 40 Arpent Terraces in Southeast Louisiana

Applying Organization	Common Ground Relief, Inc.	Application Date	5/14/2026
Applying Contact	Bonnie Goldblum	Status	Submitted
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		Create Account	<input type="checkbox"/>

Project Overview

Project Name	Vegetating the 40 Arpent Terraces in Southeast Louisiana	Requested Amount	\$48,505.00
Project/Campaign Name	Vegetating the 40 Arpent Terraces in Southeast Louisiana		
Type of Project	Restoration	Project Multiple Locations	
Project Location (State or Territory)	LA	Longitude	-89.970226
Latitude	29.972744		

Organization Details

Organization Name	Common Ground Relief	Primary address for organization	1800 Deslonde Street New Orleans, Louisiana 70117 United States
Contact Name	Christina Lehew	Contact Title	Executive Director
Contact Email Address	christina@commongroundrelief.org		
Annual Operating Budget	\$311,340.00	Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Staff Size	4	Main Phone	504-312-1729
Total Membership		Organization Website/Social Media Feed	https://www.commongroundrelief.org
BIPOC-led	Yes	C-Suite Staff	Common Ground Relief's Board of Directors is comprised of eight members, 50% of whom identify as Black/Creole and 50% as White.

Grant Details

Awarded Amount		Awarded Date	
Funding Program			
Primary Project Type		Secondary Project Type	
Term Start Date		Term End Date	

Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization

Common Ground Relief (CGR), established as a disaster relief organization in 2005, seeks "to foster environmental and community stewardship so that residents can survive and thrive now and in the future." CGR realizes its mission through wetlands restoration, environmental education, and the distribution of resiliency resources to vulnerable residents. CGR prioritizes support for communities that are most impacted by racial and environmental inequities.

Over the past two decades, CGR has engaged nearly 100,000 local and visiting volunteers in restoring over 200 linear miles of coastal shoreline; enhanced urban street plantings to improve hydrology and mitigate rising heat levels; provided thousands of native trees to local partners; and fostered a new generation of environmental stewards. CGR has also distributed food, household, and disaster supplies to over 15,800 people through its Free Pantry.

Location Details

Louisiana is in an environmental crisis. Over the past century, natural and human activities, including levee construction, oil and gas extraction, navigation channels, and other infrastructure, have disrupted the coastal ecology. Saltwater from the Gulf of America has moved inland, devastating thriving freshwater swamps and marshes, and weakening the ecological functions and protections they once provided. Louisiana has lost more than 2,000 square miles of coastal land since 1932, nearly 25% of its historic land area, and continues to lose approximately 24 square miles of wetlands each year, roughly one football field every 100 minutes.

Vegetating the 40 Arpent Terraces in Southeast Louisiana will restore habitat within the Central Wetlands Unit (CWU), a 29,140-acre urban-adjacent ecosystem spanning St. Bernard and Orleans Parishes, in southeast Louisiana. As recently as the 1960s, the CWU's bald cypress and water tupelo swamps, freshwater marshes, and bottomland hardwood forests protected nearby communities from flooding and storm surge, provided habitat to millions of birds, fish, and other wildlife, enhanced water quality, and provided an array of economic, recreational, and cultural benefits.

The intrusion of saltwater reduced the CWU to a "ghost swamp" of open water, unable to provide vital ecological benefits and functions. The impacts of this ecological catastrophe were exposed and exacerbated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In 2005, wind-driven waves funneled up the MRGO from the Gulf of America to flood St. Bernard Parish and the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans. Following the hurricanes, Louisiana launched two major efforts to rebuild its coastal defenses: (1) the Comprehensive Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast (CMP), a 50-year blueprint for coastal restoration and flood risk reduction projects coastwide; and (2) the closure of the MRGO.

Since the closure of MRGO in 2010, salinity levels in the CWU have declined, creating favorable conditions for restoration. Projects aligned with the CMP have demonstrated measurable land-building success.

Yet, continued land loss, sea-level rise, and increasingly frequent and intense storms threaten these fragile wetlands. Louisiana is projected to lose another 500 square miles of coastal land over the next 30 years. Strategic restoration in the CWU is urgently needed to rebuild

habitat, strengthen natural flood protection, and preserve one of southeast Louisiana's most critical coastal landscapes.

The CMP identifies the restoration of the CWU as a priority, which will benefit the ecosystem, and the residents of St. Bernard Parish and the Lower 9th Ward community in New Orleans.

Final Success

Vegetating the 40 Arpent Terraces in Southeast Louisiana (Vegetating 40) will help restore approximately 750 acres of degraded habitat in the Central Wetlands Unit by planting 1,000 native trees, 6,000 native marsh grass plugs, and # shrubs and pollinators, as well as dispersing thousands of native seeds on nearly 100,000 linear miles of terraces built by Ducks Unlimited.

Impact on Climate and Bioversity

Louisiana's CMP includes strategies to reduce flood risks to coastal communities, build sustainable coastal ecosystems, support vital wildlife, and maintain community ties to the state's natural environment. These plans incorporate the Multiple Lines of Defense Strategy ("MLDS"), which supports the combined use of coastal habitat restoration techniques to best achieve coastal ecological and community resiliency. Vegetated marsh terraces, a form of nature-based living shorelines, play an integral role in the MLDS.

Terraces are stabilized coastal edges made of natural materials like plants, sand, or rock, that effectively build climate resilience. Designed for site-specific conditions, they stabilize large areas of degraded marsh; attenuate storm surge and flooding, thus protecting people and property; dissipate wind-driven wave energy and reduce current speeds and fetch, which minimizes erosion of existing shorelines and wetlands; encourage sediment accretion, thus counteracting the effects of subsidence and sea-level rise; and protect adjacent marsh from saltwater intrusion.

Planting a diverse mix of native trees, grasses, shrubs, and pollinator-friendly species on the crown and edges of terraces significantly enhances their ecological impacts. Plant roots bind the terrace materials, significantly enhancing stability and resistance to erosion, particularly during storm events. Furthermore, the vegetation will improve water quality and support critical breeding, foraging, and sheltering habitat for a wide range of aquatic, avian, and pollinator species.

Studies show that, compared to armored human-made structures, vegetated terraces are more cost-effective, more effective in preventing catastrophic storm damage and erosion over time, and provide ecological benefits similar to those of natural shorelines. Vegetating 40 will fortify terraces with biodiverse plants, strengthening resilience to hurricanes, flooding, sea-level rise, and other stressors while restoring the ecological functions that sustain healthy coastal ecosystems.

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

The Vegetating 40 project site is directly in front of the 40 Arpents Wetlands Observatory in the city of Chalmette in St. Bernard Parish. This site contains a boathouse, lagoon, and pedestrian bridge that provides access for canoeing, kayaking, paddle boating, fishing, birdwatching, and nature observation. Vegetating 40 will create a robust habitat that attracts and supports fish, crustaceans, reptiles, birds, and ducks. This rich wildlife will benefit visitors, including local and tourists, student and youth groups, who visit the 40 Arpents Wetlands Observatory to experience and enjoy the rich biodiversity and magnificent landscapes of southeast Louisiana. The increase in activity at and around the 40 Arpents Wetlands Observatory will benefit the many businesses along Highway 47 (aka Paris Road) in Chalmette and New Orleans East, including boat launches, bait shops, sporting goods stores, and marine repair and supply businesses.

Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

Ongoing restoration and development efforts are underway to connect the 40 Arpent Wetlands Observatory, Chenier Lagoon Park, and Torres Park. and parish-wide bicycle trails. Vegetating 40 will enhance the connectivity.

Vegetating 40 builds upon the following CWU projects:

(1) DU's 40 Arpent Canal Wetlands Enhancement Terracing Project (Phase One). In 2023, Phase One completed the construction of 30,500 linear feet of terraces, constructed of local dredge, restoring 200 acres of wetlands bordering St. Bernard and Orleans Parishes. Terraces were ringed with smooth cordgrass immediately after construction to prevent erosion, but the crowns were left bare;

(2) The Coastal Wetlands Restoration Coalition (CWRC), funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, planted thousands of trees, grasses, and pollinator plants across a 30,000-acre area in the CWU, including the Phase One DU terraces. CWRC's initial observations revealed rapid erosion on the far ends of the Phase One terraces, where wind and wave energy rapidly cut the fresh shoreline. CWRC planted 1,000 saplings on the crowns, and cutgrass, California bulrush, and pickerelweed to fortify the structures and diversify plant life at the water level. Post-project monitoring revealed that the saplings planted in the center did not survive due to high winds and harsh sun; and

(3) Phase Two Terraces (Identified as Meraux Terraces on the attached permit documents): DU is currently constructing an additional 61,050 linear feet of terraces, to the north and east sides of the Phase One terrace field. This phase will restore 400 acres of wetlands.

Vegetating 40 partners, Common Ground Relief and the Meraux Foundation, are CWRC members. Based on their experience with this physical site, they have identified the following challenges:

Until a substantial shrub layer provides some protection for saplings, wind across the former swamp's open waters will prevent saplings from surviving; and

Need for immediate planting to prevent erosion and outcompete non-native species that may establish through wind dispersal.

With decades of knowledge and experience in restoration techniques, boating protocols, volunteer engagement, and this particular site,

Common Ground Relief and the Meraux Foundation will address those challenges and undertake these next steps:

September 2026 - October 2026

The Meraux Foundation is a major landowner in the terrace footprint, along with Midsouth Land Corp, Viking Land Holdings, Schnell Investments, and Taurus Properties. The Meraux Foundation has provided permission and will obtain permissions from the other property owners.

Common Ground Relief will source native seeds for pollinator species to spread on the terraces, retaining a portion of the seed stock to grow in its Native Plant Nursery for later plantings.

Common Ground Relief and Meraux Foundation will scope out and initiate three (3) marsh grass plantings

September 2026 - August 2027

Outreach to secure 100 volunteers from New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward, local high schools and universities from the Greater New Orleans Area, and residents of St. Bernard Parish.

December 2026-January 2027

On Phase I terrace fields, Common Ground Relief and the Meraux Foundation will lead two (2) events targeting the removal of invasive species, namely Chinese Tallow trees, ahead of native tree plantings to reduce competition and improve overall environmental quality.

November 2026 - February 2027

On the Phase One terrace fields, over ten (10) events, volunteers will plant 1,000 native trees where protective vegetation is established, completing canopy development.

Volunteers will pot 1,000 seeds in Common Ground Relief's Native Plant Nursery to plant in 2027 on Phase II terraces.

February 2027 - April 2027

On the Phase Two terraces, over six (6) events, volunteers will plant 6,000 native marsh grass plugs (California Bulrush, Cutgrass, and Pickerelweed) along the edges, with higher density at vulnerable ends to protect against wind and wave erosion; and

March 2027 - April 2027

Volunteers will create seed balls by mixing seeds into clay and soil. The soil-clay mix will help prevent seeds from blowing away and anchor them to the terrace surface until rain loosens the balls and triggers germination.

May 2027 - June 2027

Across the Phase 1 and 2 terraces, volunteers will deploy seed balls and plant pollinator plants, including swamp sunflower and hibiscus grown out in the Native Plant Nursery.

The successive plantings at various elevations will allow many different species to grow in a compact area and protect plants from sun and wind; and

Common Ground Relief will lead project implementation, including administration, volunteer mobilization, planting operations, nursery propagation, monitoring, and stewardship.

The Meraux Foundation will secure landowner permission, provide expert advice, provide boats to transport plant materials and staff, and assist with monitoring. The Meraux Foundation, which is dedicated to improving the quality of life and building resilience in St. Bernard Parish, is a leader in environmental restoration and protection.

The Vegetating 40 project site is close to Highway 47 (aka Paris Road), which features multiple boat launches, bait shops, sporting goods stores, and marine repair and supply businesses. CGR patronizes those businesses for a variety of goods and services. Local support, through discounted prices or in-kind donation of services or goods, as well as highlighting the restoration projects, would help support CGR's efforts. More broadly, local and national businesses in the maritime, seafood, energy, and other related sectors can support CGR through financial grants, in-kind donations of major equipment, including boats and trucks (needed for transporting people and supplies), and volunteering with CGR. CGR has hosted many corporate volunteer groups that have benefited from the unique team-building experience.

Over one year, Vegetating 40 will deliver the following measurable on-the-ground outcomes in the CWU:

- 1,000 native trees established across two terrace fields, completing the upper-canopy layer of the restoration footprint and increasing diverse habitat;
- 6,000 marsh grass plugs installed along vulnerable terrace edges, stabilizing soil and reducing wind- and wave-driven erosion;
- Pollinator habitat established across both terrace fields, initiating the establishment of groundcover and shrub layers that support aquatic, avian, and

Key Decision Makers

Vegetating 40 will take place on private land.

Working With Business Community

Elevate Voices

Vegetating 40 will engage and mobilize volunteers from:

- New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward, in which the population is 92% Black, and 25% live in poverty. The Lower 9th Ward was the hardest hit by Hurricane Katrina and is still struggling to recover;
- Local high schools and universities from the Greater New Orleans Area, including Xavier University (an historically Black university); and
- Residents of St Bernard Parish.

CGR is committed to elevating the voices of those who have been and are currently marginalized and disproportionately impacted by racial, economic, and environmental inequities.

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

Its program designs, operational components, and leadership are informed by the experience, knowledge, needs, and capacity of the communities served. All environmental programs balance science and Traditional Ecological Knowledge from the area's rich Indigenous culture. All Vegetating 40 events will begin with a presentation on the area's multicultural history; the impacts of urban, agricultural, and industrial development on the landscape; the impacts of Hurricanes Betsy and Katrina; and ongoing restoration efforts.

pollinator species;

- 1,000 native plants propagated for future restoration in Common Ground Relief's Native Plant Nursery for deployment in late 2027, ensuring continuity of restoration and adaptive infill planting; and

- 100 community volunteers engaged in hands-on restoration and environmental learning.

Based on past planting projects, CGR anticipates ≥80% initial survival of planted vegetation one year after planting.

TCA Funding Plan

CGR has developed effective and efficient methods for executing its programs. Its primary resources are people, plants, tools, and equipment, including its one-half-acre ADA accessible native plant nursery. The Native Plant Nursery is a multi-use space where CGR grows thousands of plants, provides educational programs and horticultural job training, hosts plant giveaways, and welcomes neighbors for nature time in an urban area.

If awarded support from The Conservation Alliance, CGR will use the funds to:

- Support partial salaries of the Executive Director and Wetlands Restoration staff;
- Purchase plant materials;
- Purchase supplies, such as nutria tree protectors, plant nursery materials, tools, and volunteer supplies;
- Support transportation costs, including gas and insurance; and
- Support overhead expenses totalling 10% of the total request.

This support will be matched by in-kind expenses for:

- Meraux Foundation staff time;
- Volunteer hours; and
- 2,000 plugs of pickerelweed.

Other Relevant Application Details

1. The budget will include the following matches: (a) 2,000 plugs of pickerelweed harvested from canals bordering planting site, valued at \$2.50 per plug (TOTAL VALUE \$5,000); (b) salary of Blaise Pezold, Coastal and Environmental Program Director at the Meraux Foundation, who will provide technical guidance and support; and (c) 600 volunteer hours x \$29.95 (TOTAL VALUE \$17,970).

2. Terrace photos that include people do not show the full expanse of the terrace. These photos are available.

Confidential Items

All elements of this proposal may be shared with member company employees during the ballot process.