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Oil spill fund trustees extend deadline for public comment

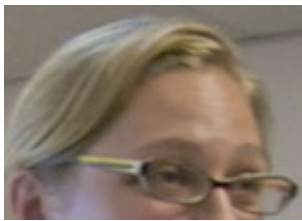
By LAUREN WALCK

lwalck@sunherald.com January 9, 2014

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Avila



People who wish to comment on proposed Coast projects funded through BP oil spill settlement money now have an extra 15 days.

The Natural Resource Damage Assessment trustees extended the deadline from Feb. 4 to Feb. 19 after extra time was requested during public hearings in December.

Four projects totaling \$68.9 million are proposed in the state, including oyster reef restoration and additions to Infinity Science Center, Popp's Ferry Causeway Park and Pascagoula Promenade.

Several organizations also voiced skepticism over the environmental benefits of some of the projects.

Roberta Avila, executive director of the STEPS Coalition, said she is glad their voices were heard.

She said the coalition is planning a meeting geared toward the Vietnamese community this month. It will be held in conjunction with the Department of the Interior at 5:30 p.m. Jan. 27 at Church of the Redeemer in Biloxi.

She said they have been working with the Environmental Law Institute, which is also planning a meeting in Bay St. Louis and one in Pascagoula on the projects.

In December, Avila and others questioned how Infinity met NRDA criteria.

"We appreciate that this project is helping to further education on coastal issues in Mississippi," Jordan Macha, policy analyst for the Gulf Restoration Network said Thursday. "However, the fact that it is 20-plus miles from the Coast, the project did not experience any loss of use due to the oil disaster."

She said the state's living shoreline project looks like a good investment. It would create oyster reefs near Pass Christian using \$50 million of the \$68.9 million.

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