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**Designers Launch Master Plan for Baton Rouge Lakes**

*The two-day visit includes meeting leaders and fact-gathering*

Landscape architects from SWA Group and Jeffrey Carbo are in Baton Rouge over the next two days to begin formal work on the master plan for restoring the lakes and making them an even better outdoor space for the community.

Led by Kinder Baumgardner, an LSU landscape architect graduate who works for SWA Group, the planners are meeting with leaders from LSU, the city-parish government, BREC and an advisory committee established by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, which is underwriting and coordinating the master planning.

University and City Park lakes – and three of the four smaller lakes that surround them – are too shallow, and are filling in with silt over time. In 2008, the Army Corps of Engineers issued a draft report that recommended dredging to deepen the lakes and installing pipes to flush sediment to keep them rich with oxygen for more than five decades.

This year, the Foundation raised nearly $750,000 for a master plan and related studies to advance the Corps draft to completion. In summer, a selection committee picked SWA Group for the work, and that firm’s Houston office is working with Jeffrey Carbo Landscape Architects on the blueprint.

Because designers need public input to shape the plan, open meetings will be held in winter. In the meantime, residents can share opinions and ideas at TheLakes.MindMixer.com, an online public engagement platform. More information about the project is also at BatonRougeLakes.org.

SWA will deliver a comprehensive design for the six lakes and 45 acres surrounding it, along with gateway suggestions for exits at I-10 and Dalrymple Drive. Planners are also charged with delivering a cohesive landscaping scheme, enabling way-finding and creating signs to support it, providing a habitat restoration strategy, and proposing methods for mitigating both noise and drainage from I-10. As well, the planners will recommend shoreline improvements with the dredged materials, such as a walking and biking paths. To achieve all these ends, they will also identify funding sources for implementation.
Recommendations for governing will be included to ensure the long-term upkeep and improvement of the City Park and LSU Lakes, along with the four smaller lakes that surround them.

The city’s lakes were created in the 1930s by transforming an undesirable stretch of swamp into open water for the parish to enjoy. LSU had located next to them just seven years earlier, and university leaders worried that mosquitoes from the swamps would spread disease, including malaria.

The water bodies face different problems today, much bigger than the conspicuous lack of safe pathways for pedestrians. If nothing is done, they will continue to decline and eventually turn into mud flats.

The Foundation announced the lakes project – Destination: The Lakes – at its 50th anniversary celebration in March. The work is being conducted in consultation with donors to the project and lake-area residents, as well as LSU, the city-parish, BREC, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, La. Department of Transportation and Development, the Center for Planning Excellence, Suzanne Turner Associates and GEC Inc. The Foundation has secured support from fund donors, generous philanthropists, and other foundations.

**About the Foundation:** The Baton Rouge Area Foundation is among more than 700 community foundations in the United States. The Foundation works in two ways to improve the quality of life across South Louisiana. One, The Foundation connects donors who open charitable accounts with nonprofits that provide services to the community. Over 50 years, fund donors and the Foundation have granted more than $350 million. Two, the foundation takes on projects that improve the quality of life. Contributions from members, who number about 600, partly underwrite these projects, which include master planning of the Baton Rouge lakes, education reform, downtown redevelopment, and creating The Water Institute of the Gulf to solve problems caused by rising seas and vanishing wetlands. People can learn more about becoming a member or opening a charitable fund by calling 225-387-6126.