WATER MARKS

Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration News

February 2007 **Number 33**

Citizens in Action

Public Participation in Coastal Planning, Protection and Restoration

Public Participation Vital to CWPPRA Process

Planning the Groundwork for Protection and Restoration

WATERMARKS Interview with Mark Davis, Carlton Dufrechou and Cathy Norman

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February 2007 Number 33

WaterMarks is published three times a year by the Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force to communicate news and issues of interest related to the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act of 1990. This legislation funds wetlands restoration and enhancement projects nationwide, designating approximately $60 million annually for work in Louisiana. The state contributes 15 percent of total project costs.

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE'S COVER . . .

Like plugs of cordgrass planted in the marsh by volunteers, the idea of public participation in coastal planning, protection and restoration has taken root in Louisiana. Numerous civic and nonprofit organizations create opportunities for citizens to learn about Louisiana's ecosystems and contribute to the wetlands' future.

Photo courtesy of Edward Wisner Donation

WaterMarks

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CONTENTS

3 Public Participation Vital to CWPPRA Process

5 Planning the Groundwork for Protection and Restoration

8 Firsthand Experiences Build Support for Coastal Protection

11 Citizens Take on the Fight for the Coast

14 WaterMarks Interview with
Mark Davis, Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana
Carlton Dufrechou, Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation
Cathy Norman, Edward Wisner Donation

For more information about Louisiana's coastal wetlands and the efforts planned and under way to ensure their survival, check out these sites on the World Wide Web:

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www.btnep.org
www.lca.gov
www.dnr.state.la.us/crm
www.crcl.org
www.louisianacoastalplanning.org

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RESIDENT'S ACTION RESULTS IN PROJECT'S FUNDING

Public Participation Vital to CWPPRA Process

Lee Richardson admits that he knew only two things when he walked into the New Orleans Corps of Engineers' offices in January 2004. "I knew we had a problem," he says, "and I knew we needed help."

Richardson owns property in Lake Catherine, a community located on the land bridge separating Lake Borgne from Lake Pontchartrain. He and fellow members of the Lake Catherine Civic Association were alarmed at the rapid erosion of the narrow land bridge and realized that if no action were taken, their community would soon wash away. The disappearance of the land bridge, a fragile deterrent to storm surges driven from the gulf, would also increase the vulnerability of other communities on Lake Pontchartrain.

Richardson was lucky to encounter Chris Monnerjahn at the Corps of Engineers. Experienced in the year-long process of seeking funding for projects through the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA), Monnerjahn offered to assist Richardson in nominating a project to protect the outermost shoreline of the land bridge. In less than a week, the men took the first step in the CWPPRA project selection process (see box, page 4) by presenting their proposal at a regional planning team meeting.

"That year, our project made the first cut, but not the second," Richardson says. But he did not accept the defeat as final. At CWPPRA meetings Richardson had met representatives from the City of New Orleans. He and the Corps collaborated with them to revise and resubmit the project.

The 2005 proposal protected erosion hot spots along the land bridge. The project generated widespread citizen involvement and political support that crossed parish lines. In a year when four projects were funded, Richardson's proposal was ranked number five.

Richardson heeded the lessons he had learned about the CWPPRA process. "The most critical lesson was not to give up," Richardson says. "All along the way I found intelligent, experienced and cooperative people willing to help. With the assistance of the Corps of Engineers, we reshaped how we addressed our problem so that the project, reinforcing a single stretch of shoreline and rebuilding the wetlands beyond it, matched CWPPRA's focus on coastal restoration." In 2006 the project, Alligator Bend Shoreline and Marsh Restoration, was the CWPPRA committee's first choice for funding.

Sharon Coogle, Koupal Communications

Without public insistence on coastal protection and restoration, traditional ways of life on Louisiana's bayous will vanish with the wetlands.

Projects Improve with Public Participation

"Richardson exemplifies how important an individual citizen can be in the CWPPRA project selection process," says Julie LeBlanc, CWPPRA Senior Project Manager at the Corps of Engineers. "CWPPRA relies on resi- >>

dents to bring localized knowledge of terrain and hydrology and to identify and support projects their communities need."

LeBlanc points out that working with a sponsor — a federal, state or local government agency or an independent environmental or civic organization — can boost the chances for an individual's success in the project selection process. "Sponsors can help develop materials and fact sheets to present a project effectively and provide support through the lengthy selection process." she says.

"Even if a project fails to be funded," says John Lopez of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, "there is value in participating in the process. Project submissions bring attention to problems of local concern, and the selection process is an opportunity to educate the public on coastal issues. There is an enormous amount of information shared at CWPPRA meetings." WM

USGS

The community of Lake Catherine lies on the East Orleans Landbridge. Although diminished by years of subsidence and erosion, this narrow strip of land still shields Lake Pontchartrain from the full destructive power of storm surges pushing through Lake Borgne from the Gulf of Mexico.

The CWPPRA Project Selection Process

January
Four regional planning teams meet, accept nominations for the year's priority project list.

February – March
A coast-wide planning team selects up to 20 projects and six demonstration projects* from the nominations.

CWPPRA federal agencies assign project leaders to assist DNR and stakeholders in project development.

CWPPRA's engineering and environmental work groups review projects' features, potential benefits and estimated costs.

CWPPRA's technical committee receives work group reports, selects 10 candidate projects and three demonstration projects for more detailed assessment.

March – September
Lead agencies develop preliminary wetland value assessment data, estimate projects' engineering and construction costs, conduct site visits.

The environmental, engineering and economic work groups evaluate data and estimates, work with the academic advisory group to refine project features.

Project prioritization scores are developed based on
- cost effectiveness related to acres created, protected and restored
- addressing needs in high loss area
- absence of impediments to implementation
- certainty and sustainability of benefits

The technical committee conducts hearings to educate the public, receives comments on candidate projects.

The technical committee recommends up to four of the 10 projects to the CWPPRA Task Force and may also recommend demonstration projects.

October
The CWPPRA Task Force, considering the technical committee's recommendations, selects projects to receive funding for Phase I (engineering and design).

* **What are demonstration projects?**
Usually costing less than $2 million, demonstration projects test unproven technology for restoring coastal Louisiana. The technology must be innovative, applicable to multiple areas and cost-effective.

PEOPLE'S IDEAS SHAPE PROJECTS

Planning the Groundwork for Protection and Restoration

Planning, protecting, restoring — the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) is charged with performing these tasks.

But unlike many other governmental programs, CWPPRA invites public participation in shaping its projects.

Often citizen involvement is augmented by people joining with others and acting through an organization. In the following articles, WaterMarks considers the contributions of several of the many organizations that support CWPPRA in its work on behalf of coastal Louisiana.

The Planning Paradigm

"The very beginning, the foundation of any plan," says Mark Ford, the executive director of the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana (CRCL), "is a paradigm for its possibility. What makes public projects that affect a large population successful? It's an atmosphere of acceptance and support."

According to Ford, it is the work of CRCL to create that atmosphere for coastal restoration. Before any CWPPRA project is so much as a stake in the ground, CRCL is engaged in educating the public and persuading them to embrace the sacrifices that the project may ask of them.

CRCL looks for any way possible to empower stakeholders — individuals, communities, organizations, industries — to take responsibility for coastal protection and restoration. "Often we link together people who don't know one another but share an interest, a concern," says Ford. "As the need for restoration and protection increases, so do the opportunities for public participation. We're a catalyst for making those opportunities happen."

Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation

Local knowledge of coastal conditions, from water quality to hydrologic patterns to oyster beds and shipping traffic, helps scientists and engineers design projects to address the needs of specific locales.

Plan as Concept

One of 28 community-led estuary programs established by congressional mandate under the Clean Water Act, the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP) fosters a healthy estuary system by addressing environmental conservation and restoration at a watershed level. Its initial task, developing the Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) for the Barataria and Terrebonne basins, was completed in 1996. In the several coastal planning efforts since, including that of the current Coastal Protection and Restoration >>

Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation

Above: Clean-up campaigns involve citizens of all ages. Trash, debris, and pet waste are common urban pollutants that degrade water quality in lakes and streams.
Below: Traveling by air boat to minimize damage to fragile marshes, the CWPPRA Environmental and Engineering Work Group inspects the site of a proposed project.

Authority, the basic blueprint of the CCMP has been reaffirmed.

As sound a foundation for planning as the CCMP has proved to be, the program director of BTNEP, Kerry St. Pé, thinks BTNEP's greatest contribution to environmental restoration is the collaborations that result from its network. "We've brought together hundreds and hundreds of people from federal and state agencies, from the educational and scientific communities, from business and industry, from the public at large," St. Pé says. "We look at the entire system and try to link various components together."

The CCMP proposed 51 actions to achieve a viable estuary within 25 years. The public is involved in teams that carry out these actions. "Each team sets the course for its project, determines the tasks, and decides how to divide annual funding," says St. Pé.

BTNEP's role has evolved over the years as it expands programs in pursuit of goals set forth in the CCMP. Consistently viewed as a credible source of information, BTNEP remains involved in public

USACE

USFWS

Invited by the lead agency for CWPPRA's Goose Point/Pointe Platte Marsh Creation project, the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation examined the science behind the project and suggested improvements to its design. The goal of the project is to prevent further breaches along the lake shoreline, rebuild marsh habitat and reduce areas of open water behind the shoreline.

outreach and education and in project comment and review.

Plan as Design

When reclaiming the waters and habitats of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin involves coastal projects, the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation (LPBF) approaches CWPPRA as a natural partner.

"We can identify and recommend projects and provide technical assistance," says John Lopez, director of LPBF's coastal program. "And we can educate, advocate, and encourage citizens to support the projects. But our greatest strength lies in building partnerships among all parties interested in restoring and preserving the basin."

The marsh creation project at Goose Point, along the northern shoreline of Lake Pontchartrain, exemplifies how well those partnerships can work. Invited by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to participate, LPBF monitored the science and engineering aspects of the project during its development. "We had some questions about how the modeling was done," Lopez says. "We wanted to be sure the plan was right, to determine the best possible design."

During a visit to the project site, Lopez met with a local resident who shared his observations about water flow patterns in the area. "Local people know the geography well," Lopez says. "Because this man was willing to get involved, we were able to change the plans a little and avoid a negative effect on the natural hydrology." WM

A ROAD MAP FOR REBUILDING THE COAST

Public Input Produces Innovation

By the late 1990s the battle to save Louisiana's coast had seen numerous small victories. But the state still lacked a comprehensive plan integrating federal, state and local restoration efforts and offering a clear vision for the coast's future.

Incorporating residents' input gathered at 65 public meetings across the coast, scientists and federal, state and local governments hammered out a plan supporting the environment, economy and culture of Louisiana's wetlands. Released in 1998 by the CWPPRA Task Force, *Coast 2050: Toward a Sustainable Coastal Louisiana* proposed integrating protection and restoration efforts throughout the region to reestablish the wetlands' natural processes — accumulation of sediment, diversity of habitat and landforms, and the movement of organisms throughout the ecosystem.

Coast 2050 provided the first coast-wide assessment of changes in fish and wildlife populations, outlined quantitative methods for projecting future land loss, and, in partnership with the public, established restoration priorities and strategies that CWPPRA uses in its project planning and selection process.

CONSERVATIONISTS CONNECT PEOPLE, LANDSCAPE

Firsthand Experiences Build Support for Coastal Protection

Conservationists aren't born, they're made, says Randy Lanctot, executive director of the Louisiana Wildlife Federation.

Whether fishing from a sandy beach, exploring a brackish marsh or gazing into the canopy of a centuries-old oak forest, he says, "We learn to appreciate and protect nature through experience. The goal of conservation is to preserve these places — and the experiences they offer us — wherever we can."

As they safeguard habitat critical for wildlife across southern Louisiana, conservation groups also ensure opportunities for the public to explore, enjoy and learn from coastal ecosystems.

Partnerships Protect Woodland Habitat

Each spring thousands of migrating birds drop from the skies over Louisiana's Grand Isle, exhausted from their 500-mile journey across the Gulf of Mexico. In the island's oak-hackberry forests the birds find food, fresh water and a safe place to rest. Scientists and birdwatchers from around the world flock to Grand Isle to view, photograph and document the annual event — a boon not only to our understanding of migratory birds, but also to the island's economy.

But Grand Isle's forests face extinction, their trees cut to make room for houses, camps and busi-

The Nature Conservancy

Above: A trail built by The Nature Conservancy improves public access to Grand Isle's live oak–dominated forests, one of the rarest habitats in the world.
Opposite, top: So Louisianans could continue to enjoy the natural beauty and bountiful fishing at Elmer's Island, the Louisiana Wildlife Federation and the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP) campaigned for its reopening.
Opposite, bottom: Because even scattered trees provide vital habitat to migrating birds such as the prothonotary warbler, The Nature Conservancy encourages Grand Isle landowners to plant native species of oak and hackberry.

Chris Dunn

nesses. Populations of many bird species have declined as the woods that once sheltered and fed them have been felled. To preserve the remaining woodlands, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), a nonprofit conservation organization, purchased 30 acres of forest on Grand Isle and established management agreements with landowners to protect another 70 acres. "We've secured the largest, most ecologically valuable tracts of forest on the island," says TNC's Cindy Brown.

Through a birding festival, a birding trail and other projects, TNC and its partners on Grand Isle educate the public about the island's forest. "Birders get it," Brown says. "They already understand the importance of this forest for migrating birds. As we've improved public access to the forest, the concept of protecting these trees has caught on. From individual lot owners to the chamber of commerce, people across Grand Isle are engaged in preserving this unique habitat." >>

BTNEP

Chris Dunn

Volunteers Visit Sanctuary's Inner Reaches

Since 1924 the Audubon Society has protected the 26,000-acre Paul J. Rainey Wildlife Sanctuary in Vermilion Parish, owning the land to shield it from encroaching development. The preserve is now threatened from within, as wind-driven waves erode the fragile shorelines of interior lakes.

"Eventually those lakes could coalesce, creating a very large body of open water," explains Tim Vincent, the sanctuary's manager. Working with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Louisiana Department of Natural Resources and Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, the Audubon Society undertook a project to slow the rate of loss.

Some 36,000 feet of earthen terraces were built within open water areas to reduce wave action and protect shorelines. "The terraces also trap sediment, which will eventually rebuild marsh," Vincent says.

When the terraces were completed, groups of volunteers and middle- and high school students trekked deep into the Rainey Sanctuary to plant smooth cordgrass on the terraces to hold the soil in place.

"In addition to protecting habitat for wildlife, Audubon is committed to engaging people of all ages and backgrounds in conservation work," Vincent says. "The planting aspect of this project was an opportunity to bring people into the sanctuary so they could experience this wetland."

Bringing Back the Beach

For generations of Louisianans, a day at the beach meant a short drive to Elmer's Island, 1,700 acres of privately owned barrier beachfront, salt marsh and low dunes 50 miles south of New Orleans. For a small fee, families enjoyed fishing, crabbing, bird-watching and playing in the surf at one of the state's few car-accessible sandy beaches.

But due to liability concerns, in 2002 the island was closed to the public, its gates locked and its land put up for sale.

The Louisiana Wildlife Federation (LWF) soon launched a campaign urging the state to buy and reopen Elmer's Island. Public support was immediate and widespread. The state was interested, too. Nevertheless, efforts to buy the land moved slowly.

"By law, the state can pay only the appraised value of the property," explains the LWF's Randy Lanctot. "But the owner has not been willing to sell at that price."

In 2005, the LWF enlisted the Trust for Public Land (TPL), a nonprofit organization that conserves land for public use, in the fight for Elmer's Island. A purchase agreement between the owner and the trust may allow the TPL to buy the land from the Elmer family, then sell it to the state for the appraised value. The sale is not yet final, but Lanctot is hopeful.

"Our goal is to protect Elmer's Island and other places like it," Lanctot says, "so future generations can come to gain an appreciation for Louisiana's coastal landscape." WM

Audubon Society

Groups of volunteers traveled by boat 13 miles into the brackish marshes of the Audubon Society's Paul J. Rainey Wildlife Sanctuary. The smooth cordgrass they planted along manmade terraces stabilizes the soil and will jump-start the growth of new marsh.

COMMUNITY-BASED RESTORATION PROJECTS REBUILD WETLANDS

Citizens Take on the Fight for the Coast

An acre every 38 minutes. Nearly 2,000 square miles in the last century. The alarming rate and immense scale of Louisiana's land loss can seem too large a challenge for any project or entity to affect.

But as three Louisiana organizations prove, motivated citizens can make a difference through projects big and small that restore coastal habitats.

Raising the Reefs

Reefs, the foundation of the marine food chain, provide hard-structure habitat for a variety of organisms, including algae, soft corals and oysters. As crabs, shrimp and crustaceans congregate near reefs to feed on plants and small invertebrates, they attract popular game fish like trout and redfish.

"Reefs are vital to Louisiana's fisheries, but across the coast hard-structure habitat is eroding and subsiding," says John Walther, artificial reef coordinator for Coastal Conservation Association–Louisiana (CCA). The CCA replaces some of that lost habitat with artificial reefs built from small chunks of limestone.

Scheduled for construction in summer 2007, a >>

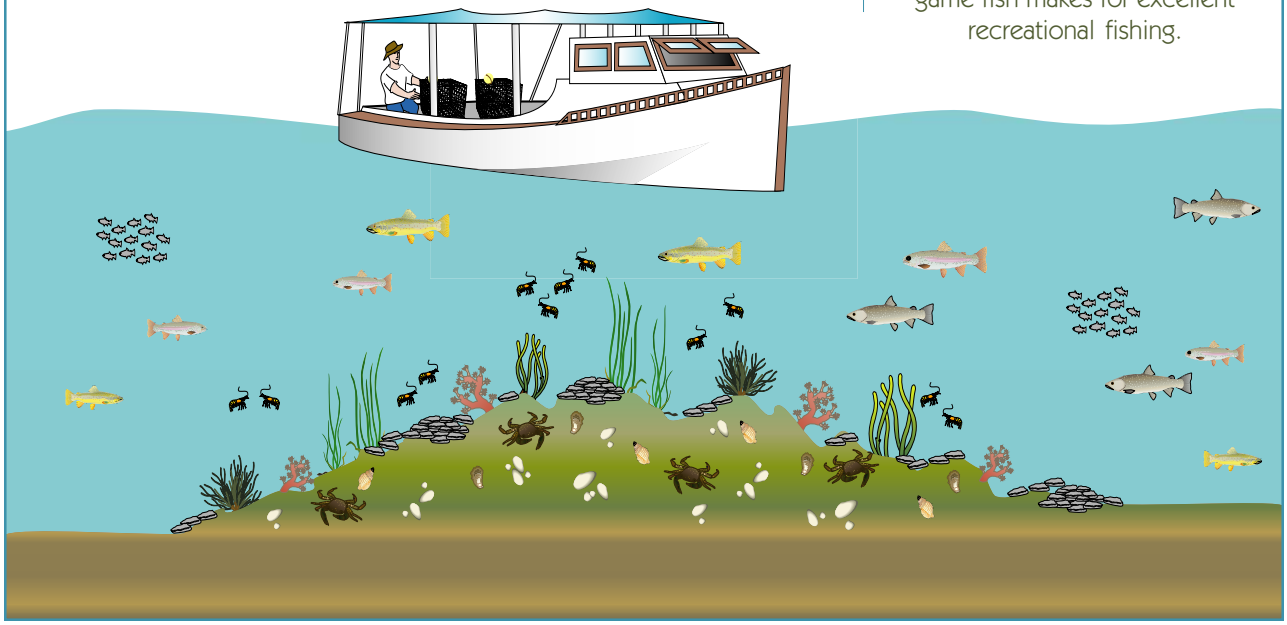
Hard-Structure Habitat Vital to Marine Food Chain

Artificial Reefs Support Diverse Aquatic Life

1. Soft corals, plants, and oysters and other mollusks attach to the reef's hard surfaces.

2. Small invertebrates such as crabs and shrimp feast on plants and coral and find shelter in the reef's nooks and crannies.

3. Trout, redfish, black drum, croaker and other popular game fish congregate near reefs to feed on crustaceans and other reef dwellers. The presence of these game fish makes for excellent recreational fishing.



Louisiana Wetlands Association

2.5-acre reef in the Turner's Bay area of Calcasieu Lake will be the group's third and its largest yet. It may also become the first artificial reef in Louisiana made from concrete slabs donated by local manufacturers. The shrimping industry is concerned the slabs will snag and damage nets," but we will mark the reef so shrimp boat captains can steer clear," Walther says. "Environmentally friendly, concrete will allow us to build large, long-lasting reefs to support our recreational fisheries."

CCA–Louisiana

From Advocacy to Action

Alarmed by the decline in Vermilion Bay's recreational fishing, six Abbeville businessmen and public officials formed the Louisiana Wetlands Association (LWA) in January 2005.

"Our goal was to increase public understanding of and support for restoration efforts in Vermilion Parish," says Russell Gaspard, the LWA's secretary. "We wanted to be an advocacy and awareness group." But as the LWA's membership grew, so did its ambitions, and within a year the group had secured a grant to build an oyster reef in Prien Point, a mile south of North Lake.

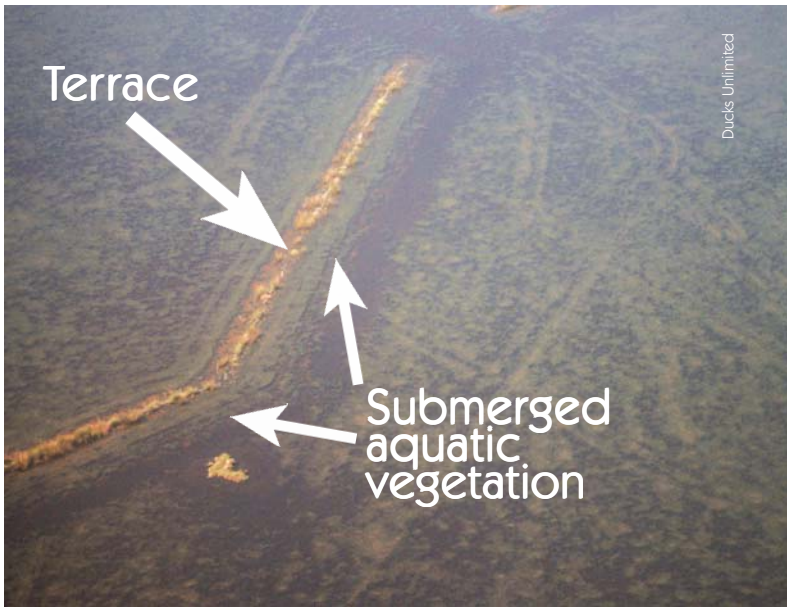
Public and political support for the project was overwhelmingly positive, Gaspard says. Three local restaurants contributed 200 cubic yards of oyster shells to form the reef's foundation. An oyster-fishing family offered to help the LWA harvest live oysters to jump-start the reef habitat. Legislation suspending restrictions on bringing the oysters into the bay allowed the group to build a reef instantly alive.

"Within two weeks, people were catching fish off the reef," Gaspard says.

Terraces Tame Turbulent Waters

Across broad expanses of wetland, wind-driven waves disturb the mucky bottoms of open-water areas. The resulting turbidity — suspension of sediment and other particles in the water — keeps sunlight from penetrating the water column and prevents the growth of a primary food source for many duck species, submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV).

"If we can reduce turbidity in these areas, we can



Opposite, top left: Louisiana oyster fishermen supplied 2,000 cubic yards of oysters to build a living reef in Vermilion Bay.
Opposite, top right: Deposited near Prien Point, a mile south of North Lake, the oysters form a one-acre reef that will protect shoreline by buffering wave energy.
Opposite, lower left: Hungry for hard-structure habitat, coral and other marine organisms quickly colonize artificial reefs.
Above: A Cameron Parish wetland provided an ideal location for terraces, says Ducks Unlimited biologist Chad Courville. "We sought marshes that had degraded into large, open-water areas with high turbidity and poor growth of submerged aquatic vegetation."
Right: Submerged aquatic vegetation quickly colonized open-water areas around the 1,000-foot-long, 10-foot-wide terraces.

encourage sediment accretion and SAV growth," says Chad Courville, regional biologist with Ducks Unlimited (DU).

To calm the waters in a Cameron Parish marsh, a 2002 DU restoration project built earthen terraces in zig-zag fashion across large, shallow ponds. "This 'duck-wing' design means that regardless of wind direction, there will always be calm water on one side of the terrace, allowing sediment to settle and the water to clear," Courville explains. As plants colonize the accreted sediment, they hold it in place, eventually building new marsh that provides food for wintering and resident waterfowl as well as habitat for shrimp, crabs and fish.

"Because our state is losing habitat very quickly, we're engaged in projects that restore wetlands today," Courville says. "But DU's goal for coastal Louisiana is long-term sustainability. Working with communities, corporations and state and federal agencies, we are building support for public policy that protects the future of our coast." WM

WaterMarks Interview

with ***Mark Davis,*** *Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana;* ***Carlton Dufrechou,*** *Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation;* ***Cathy Norman,*** *Edward Wisner Donation*

Pathways to Public Participation

WM: There are many different groups working on coastal restoration issues in Louisiana. How does your organization differ from others?

DAVIS: The Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana (CRCL) exists to ensure the successful stewardship of the entire Louisiana coast — economically, culturally and ecologically. In a search for shared solutions to coastal issues, we bring diverse groups together, convene scientists and experts, conduct public meetings, educate people, support citizen participation in hands-on projects, assist in shaping legislation — we take whatever step is necessary to restore and protect Louisiana's coast. We are more a civics experiment than an engineering one.

Mark Davis
Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana

DUFRECHOU: In 1989 a group of citizens, remembering Pontchartrain Lake as a recreational Mecca, established the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation (LPBF) to restore and preserve the water quality and habitat of the region's 10,000 square miles of land and water. The foundation identifies problems, develops solution alternatives, and acts as a catalyst to focus attention, generate public interest, provide technical support, and press elected officials to support restoration activities.

NORMAN: Title to the 35,000-acre holdings of the Edward Wisner Donation is held in trust by the City of New Orleans. Beneficiaries of this quasi-public, not-for-profit organization include the city, the state of Louisiana and nonprofit entities such as hospitals and the Salvation Army. We manage the Donation in the financial interest of its beneficiaries, investing in its long-term protection and sustainability while producing an annual income through its economic development.

Deriving most of our revenue from oil and gas leases, we write strict environmental safeguards into our contracts and place observers in the field to ensure compliance. Doing so protects vital infrastructure as well as the Donation's holdings; an eroding coast puts energy resources for the entire country at risk.

WM: Please give an example of how your organization has contributed to coastal planning, protection and restoration.

DAVIS: CRCL has been around since the late 1980s, before there was any kind of government mechanism to turn coastal planning into action, before there was any state funding. Using tax dollars for coastal restoration required amending Louisiana's state constitution. We helped to frame the legislation and built public support for the amendment through an education campaign.

DUFRECHOU: In 2005, the LPBF developed the Coastal Lines of Defense strategy. Basically, this identifies key natural features of our coast that have the potential to reduce storm surges, such as barrier islands, marsh landbridges and ridges. Once identified, these features become priorities for coastal restoration. Thus, we double the value of each dollar we invest – coastal restoration plus enhanced storm protection."

NORMAN: In 2003, we brought together nine public- and private-sector partners and furnished $250,000 in seed money to kick off a community-based restoration project. We leveraged a $150,000 grant from NOAA into an $800,000 project that affected 2,000 acres in Lafourche Parish, creating marsh, restoring shoreline, protecting beaches and improving hydrology. The effort models the way private landowners, businesses, government agencies, nonprofit organiza-

Carlton Dufrechou
Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation

tions, academic institutions and individual citizens can work together to restore our coast.

WM: What action do you consider most critical to protect and restore Louisiana's coast?

DAVIS: We must create the capacity for success, an atmosphere of public insistence for authorizing and funding coastal restoration. Many CWPPRA projects demonstrate that we have the technical capability to change conditions in the wetlands; we can point to these successes to justify investing in larger, more comprehensive projects.

But neither CWPPRA nor any other program out there now is of large enough scale or sufficiently funded to get the job done. CRCL's role is to organize support, to create a constituency that makes authorization and funding of projects possible.

DUFRECHOU: The most critical action for southeast Louisiana is the immediate closure of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO). Since the early 1960s, the MRGO has been a cancer eating away at our coast. Dredging the MRGO bisected more than 40 miles of wetlands below New Orleans, and completely altered the hydrology — the plumbing — of the coast. If we don't plug the MRGO, we're just whistling in the wind and have no long-term hope of restoring or preserving Louisiana's coast east of the Mississippi River.

NORMAN: We'd say protecting and restoring barrier islands and shorelines, the first coastal line of defense, is most critical. Protecting this environment benefits all the natural and man-made resources that lie beyond it.

We need big projects. We need to establish an ongoing coastal restoration industry, like the highway department. Restoration isn't a one-shot deal — you have to build and then you have to maintain. We should be constantly dredging offshore materials and piping sediment from the river and planting to hold it all together.

There is a tremendous number of ideas for coastal restoration, many that private landowners do not know of. CWPPRA can be instrumental in educating us about them.

WM: As the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the state of Louisiana develop comprehensive hurricane protection and coastal restoration plans, what do you see as CWPPRA's role?

DAVIS: We can marry the urgency and opportunity of the present moment with CWPPRA's experience to build protection and restoration that work for coastal Louisiana. Historically CWPPRA has been successful in connecting stakeholders and modeling interagency cooperation. If CWPPRA is used well in the future, it can be a catalyst for action and partnering and a laboratory for designing and building projects.

Public outreach and engagement are strengths of CWPPRA. The public needs to know what is possible, what it has a right to expect. Expanded use of CWPPRA's outreach vehicles and public workshops can cultivate citizen participation and foster constructive dialog in today's transformed landscape.

DUFRECHOU: CWPPRA gives us the foundation for everything we do from here on out. Its numerous small projects spread over the entire coast give us good science, showing us what does and doesn't work. But CWPPRA has had no comprehensive approach to coastal preservation. Following Katrina, we need to look at the big picture, at which regions of the coast are in greatest peril, and reconsider how to prioritize projects to get the most bang out of our buck. CWPPRA is a veteran in organizing citizen participation. It needs to continue to publicize the message that the near-term restoration of the coast is imperative.

NORMAN: CWPPRA has been effective in building small projects and involving the public in coastal issues. Although we now need large projects that are beyond the scope of CWPPRA, there should always be a role for CWPPRA in developing and testing new ideas. There is a tremendous number of ideas for coastal restoration, many that private landowners do not know of. CWPPRA can be instrumental in educating us about them. WM

Cathy Norman
Edward Wisner Donation

Directory of Citizens' Groups

This list includes many of the organizations concerned with coastal planning, protection and restoration in Louisiana.

Coastwide Contacts

Atchafalaya Trace Heritage Area: (225) 342-2181, www.atchafalaya.org

Audubon Nature Institute: (504) 581-4629 *or* 1-800-774-7394, www.auduboninstitute.org

Audubon Society: www.audubon.org

Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program and Foundation: (985) 447-0868 or 1-800-259-0869, www.btnep.org

Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana: (225) 767-4181, www.crcl.org

Coastal Conservation Association–Louisiana: (225) 952-9200, www.ccalouisiana.com

Ducks Unlimited: (318) 340-1020, www.ducks.org

Gulf Restoration Network: (504) 525-1528, www.gulfrestorationnetwork.org

Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation: (504) 836-2215, www.saveourlake.org

Les Reflections du Bayou: (985) 632-6040, www.orgsites.com/la/reflections

Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN): (225) 928-1315, www.leanweb.org

Louisiana Land & Water Foundation (LLWF): www.llwf.com

Louisiana Landowners' Association: (225) 927-5619, www.louisiana2000.com/LLA

Louisiana Ornithological Society: www.losbird.org

Louisiana Wetlands Association: (337) 893-2381

Louisiana Wildlife Federation, Inc.: (225) 344-6707, www.lawildlifefed.org

Louisiana Wildlife Rehabilitators Association: (985) 789-1061, site.lawraonline.com

The Nature Conservancy of Louisiana: (225) 338-1040, www.nature.org

Parishes Against Coastal Erosion (PACE): (504) 736-6440, www.paceonline.org

Restore America's Estuaries: (703) 524-0248, www.estuaries.org

Restore or Retreat: (985) 448-4485, www.restoreorretreat.org

Sierra Club, Delta Chapter: (504) 836-3062, louisiana.sierraclub.org

Team City Grand Isle: (985) 787-2229, www.grandisleport.com

Edward Wisner Donation: (504)658-4060

Parish Programs

Assumption Parish: (985) 369-7435

Calcasieu Parish: (337) 721-3600

Cameron Parish: (337) 905-1911

Iberia Parish: (337) 369-4427

Jefferson Parish: (504) 731-4612

Lafourche Parish: (985) 446-8427 or (985) 632-4666

Livingston Parish: (225) 686-3062

Orleans Parish: (504) 658-4071 or (504) 658-4074

Plaquemines Parish: (504) 297-5320 or 1-888-784-9541

St. Bernard Parish: (504) 278-1032

St. Charles Parish: (985) 783-5060

St. James Parish: (225) 562-2262

St. John the Baptist Parish: (985) 652-9569

St. Martin Parish: (337) 394-2200

St. Mary Parish: (337) 828-4100 ext. 508

St. Tammany Parish: (985) 898-2552 or (985) 898-2552

Tangipahoa Parish: (985) 748-3211

Terrebonne Parish: (985) 580-8145 or (985) 873-6889

Vermilion Parish: (337) 898-4300

WATER MARKS
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