

CWPPRA Quick News

Bid Awarded for Cameron-Creole Watershed



Rimrock Enterprises of Justin, Texas, has been awarded the bid to begin construction on the Cameron-Creole Watershed (CCW) Hydrologic

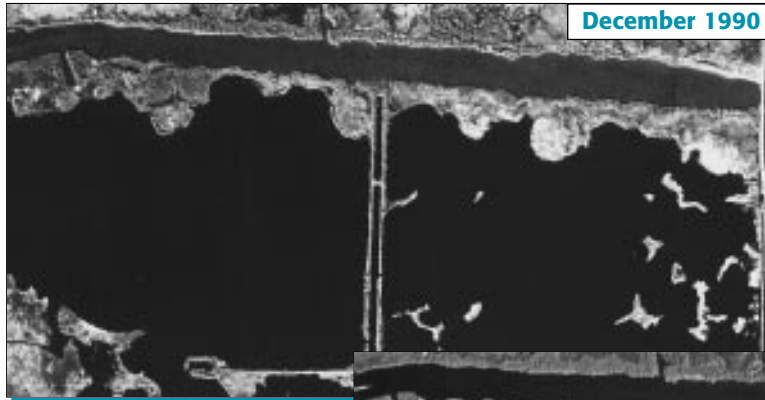
Restoration Project in southwestern Louisiana. Made up of more than 64,000 acres of brackish, freshwater and saltwater marshes, the

CCW is a busy wildlife habitat for migratory waterfowl, furbearers, amphibians, reptiles and raptors.

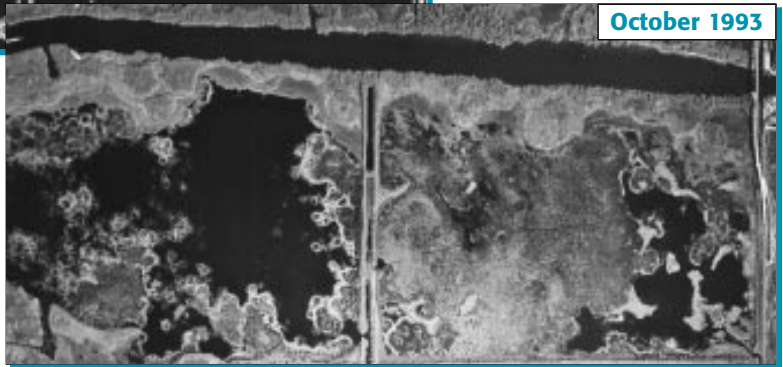
Rimrock Enterprises will construct two sheet metal plugs in a borrow canal that runs along the east side of Calcasieu Lake. The plugs will be set at normal marsh level, allowing water to

flow out of the marsh during high water or flood conditions.

Each plug will include a six-to eight-foot boat bay/water control structure to allow boat access, as well as provide added flexibility in water control through the surrounding marshes. When completed in late 1996, the project will improve both water distribution and salinity levels throughout the entire CCW. ○



December 1990



October 1993

These photos reveal the staggering impact that marsh management has had at Cameron-Creole. The view in December of 1990 shows open water throughout the area. At right is the same area nearly three years later. Continued protection and restoration efforts at Cameron-Creole should improve marsh conditions throughout the 64,00-acre watershed.



The LaBranche Wetlands shortly after the sediment transfer phase of construction. Since that time, the area has been seeded with Japanese millet. Further plantings will be completed in the project area by 1999.

Bayou LaBranche Will Take Roots



According to the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, cypress trees and marsh plants will be planted in the Bayou LaBranche Wetland Creation project area by 1999. The project, which created over 250 acres of marsh habitat along the southwestern shore of Lake Pontchartrain, was completed by the Corps of Engineers in the spring of 1994 and seeded with Japanese millet in July 1994.

Water Marks Helps Winner of Science Fair

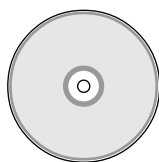
Using information he found in the Spring 1995 issue of *Water Marks*, sixth-grader Chaize Roubique of Port Allen, Louisiana, constructed a prize-winning science fair project that has gained him entry into the regional science fair. Chaize is a student at Holy Family School.

The project shows the four basic techniques used to create, protect and restore Louisiana's coastal wetlands: vegetative, structural, sedimentary and hydrologic. Judges awarded Chaize first prize for his display. ○

CWPPRA Goes On-Line

The CWPPRA Public Outreach Committee has contracted with the National Wetlands Research Center to develop both a homepage for the Internet's World Wide Web and a CD-ROM about CWPPRA. The address of the homepage will be provided in the next issue of *Water Marks*, after the page comes on-line in August. Using any common web browser, net surfers will be able to access state land-loss data, newsletters, a list of frequently asked questions, video clips, aerial and ground photos of projects, satellite imagery and information on various CWPPRA projects.

The CD-ROM project is also still in development, and CDs should be ready for release sometime during the fall. The CD will provide more detailed information, more highly enhanced imagery and longer video clips than the homepage. ○



Biotechnology...

Overcoming Poor Seed Production

Smooth cordgrass is a vigorously growing perennial grass that tolerates a wide range of water salinity and fluctuating water depths, making it an ideal species for damping wave energies and trapping suspended sediments in coastal wetlands. However, smooth cordgrass ecotypes found in the upper Gulf of Mexico basin are generally poor seed producers. Consequently, the primary method of establishing smooth

cordgrass is to transplant it by hand — a costly and laborious process.

The Crowley Rice Research Station and NRCS are developing the artificial seed to serve as an

alternative seed source, allowing smooth cordgrass to be seeded instead of transplanted.

To produce artificial seed, small plantlets developed by tissue culturing are coated with a protective gel of varying degrees of hardness to prevent drying. Because smooth cordgrass is usually planted in aquatic or semi-aquatic conditions, its artificial seeds are coated with a relatively soft gel instead of hard encapsulation. The use of gels also provides opportunities

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for incorporating additives such as nutrients, fungicides and predation inhibitors into each seed gel.

Large-Scale Plantings

What does this system for cloning large numbers of smooth cordgrass plants mean to CWPPRA and other coastal wetland restoration and protection efforts? The answer is simple. Over the past few years, smooth cordgrass has clearly shown that it can reduce or control erosion in coastal wetland areas in a variety of



Fully-grown smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*).

circumstances and conditions, used by itself or in conjunction with structural measures. Using biotechnology to produce large numbers of smooth cordgrass plants from cells is a significant step toward large-scale plantings throughout Louisiana's coastal zone. In time, with the increased availability of artificial seed, innovative techniques such as aerial seeding of remote coastal marshes could be employed in the fight against coastal erosion in Louisiana. ○

Louisiana Searches for CWPPRA Funding

Louisianians are engaged in a war to save their coastal wetlands, but the greatest struggle may not take place along the banks of the Mississippi River or the Gulf of Mexico. This war may come down to a battle of the budget waged along the corridors of the capitol in Baton Rouge.

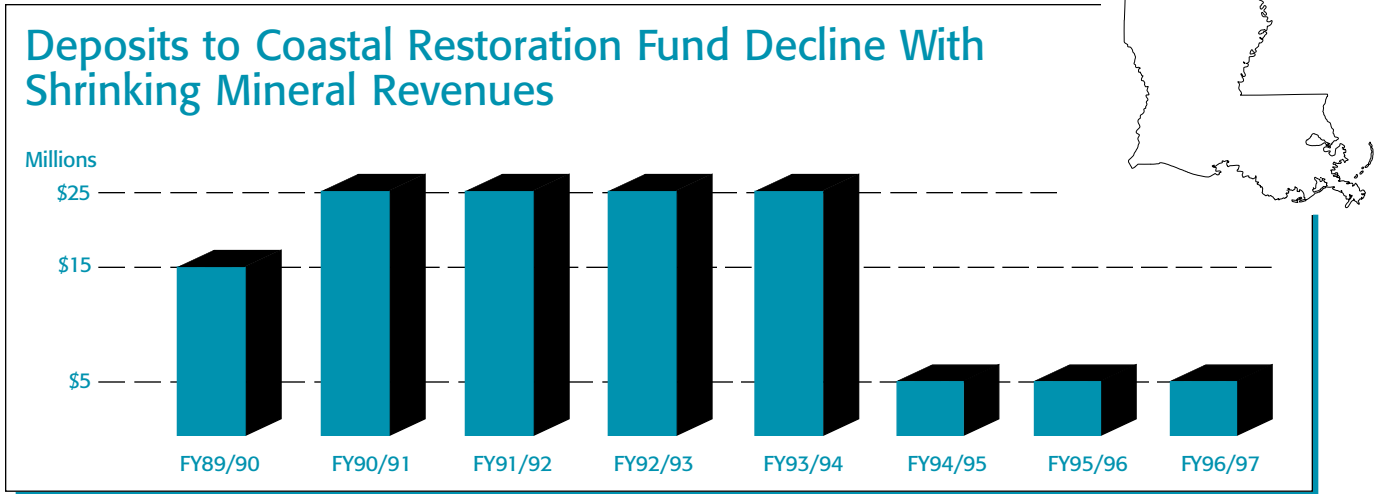
At issue is Louisiana's inability to come up with state dollars to match the federal money targeted for wetlands restoration. The Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) annually contributes \$30 million to the state for construction of projects as varied

the Wetlands Trust Fund had always been adequate to meet the federal requirement. But as the price and the production levels for these natural resources fell, so did the number of dollars coming into the fund. In the last two years, this constitutionally-earmarked source of revenue has failed to generate enough money to completely satisfy the CWPPRA matching requirements. The result: \$25.4 million of desperately needed federal funds has been left idle and possibly may be lost.

In response, the state's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has been

mined by the size of the total revenues from oil and gas taxes. If these revenues exceed \$600 million, the trust fund receives an additional \$10 million; if revenues climb to \$650 million, another \$10 million is shifted to the fund.

To compensate for deflated petroleum prices, DNR has proposed reducing the level of oil and gas revenues required before additional payments are made to the fund. It proposes that the thresholds should be \$300 million and \$350 million rather than \$600 and \$650 million. The result would be revenues of \$20



as wetlands creation, shoreline protection and freshwater diversions. But these dollars come with a condition: for every three CWPPRA dollars spent in the state, Louisiana must come up with one dollar in matching funds. This requirement means an annual outlay by the state of \$10 million to fully match federal funding.

Until recently the state match came readily. Taxes and royalties on Louisiana's vast oil and gas reserves that are automatically funneled into

aggressively pursuing alternatives to plug the gap in the matching requirement. As of today, there are two promising possibilities.

The first is to increase the dollars brought into the Wetlands Trust Fund from oil and gas taxes and royalties. This could be done by lowering the thresholds that control the flow of oil and gas tax dollars into the fund. At present, the fund automatically receives \$5 million each year. Additional amounts, however, are deter-

million annually to match federal funds.

This first option would require the Louisiana legislature to propose a constitutional amendment that would then have to be approved by popular vote. DNR submitted a bill to lower the threshold in 1995, but it failed to pass. The earliest a new bill could be considered by the legislature in regular session would be 1997.

The second possibility is to reduce the amount of money the state must

contribute to be eligible for federal dollars. Under CWPPRA's provisions, Louisiana could drop its match from 25 percent to 15 percent by writing and receiving approval for a conservation plan. This plan will have to guarantee that developmental activities within the state will not result in a net loss of coastal wetlands.

According to Dr. Bill Good, administrator of the state's Coastal Restoration Division, the conservation plan now being written will rely heavily on Louisiana's mitigation regulations already in place and will include elements such as incentives to landowners for wetlands preservation, anticipated technological innovations in restoration techniques and an outline of the public outreach and education effort. "We're looking to complete a draft of the plan by December of 1996," says Good. "If we have federal approval by June, we expect to have full implementation by the end of 1997."

Meanwhile, Governor Foster has taken immediate action to bring frozen federal dollars back to Louisiana while these two alternatives work their way through the system. "In his plan for fiscal year 1996-97, he is recommending \$7.8 million in general fund dollars be used as a federal match," says Robert D. Harper, undersecretary for the Department of Natural Resources. "That will recover the \$23.4 million left on the table over the last two years."

But the administration's commitment is far from a guarantee. In spite of all the discussion about saving coastal wetlands, it's an issue with a distant horizon competing against legislative concerns as close to home as highways and hospitals. ○

The Water Marks Interview: Dave Frugé

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difference we're looking for is not necessarily in cost or in physical size – the difference is in impact. Larger projects produce bigger results because they work at the process level. For instance, wetlands are built and nourished through basic hydrologic processes, such as fresh water and sediment flowing in and out of a wetlands area. We want to build larger projects that will restore or make use of those beneficial hydrologic processes to restore or create wetlands, or extend the life of existing wetlands.

Q So larger doesn't necessarily mean in size or cost of projects?

A Not at all. What's large about these projects is that their effects are systemic.

That means that their benefits extend to wetlands far beyond the construction footprint, and that they can affect major portions of coastal basins. Small-scale projects, like most of those we've been implementing for the last few years, have produced some very good results, but their effect is generally more localized. So, the difference between small and large isn't necessarily cost or size, but impact at the process level.

Q So, smaller projects don't work at a process level?

A For the most part, no. Most smaller projects, while they can be very effective and very necessary, work at the local level. For instance, rock barriers or breakwaters may prevent erosion of wetlands, but their impacts are often limited to

the physical project area – right around the barrier or breakwater.

We do believe, though, that groups of smaller projects can be sited, designed and operated in a coordinated way to produce process-level benefits that far exceed what those projects could accomplish individually.

Q A lot of CWPPRA's public success thus far, however, has been tied to the number of small, local projects spread throughout the coastal zone. Do you think the shift to larger projects could affect the public's perception of success?

A Well, there's no doubt that larger projects will affect public opinion. They take more time to build and often affect more people's lives. For instance, some larger diversion projects might require the relocation of bridges and highways, impact navigation, and substantially shift fishing activities (such as the oyster harvest). But I really think there's a growing understanding on the part of the public that we need to start focusing more on larger projects that will, in the long run, produce longer-lasting and more substantial benefits. I also think they'll accept the fact that it takes longer to build projects that produce those benefits. ○



"Placing more emphasis on larger projects is the next logical step in CWPPRA's evolution."

Dave Frugé is field supervisor of the Lafayette Field Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and represents the Department of Interior on the CWPPRA Task Force.



The *Water Marks* Interview: Dave Frugé

Over the last year, the CWPPRA Task Force has reviewed the project selection and implementation process. One outcome of this review has been the Task Force's decision to devote a larger share of CWPPRA's annual funding to larger projects that have farther-reaching effects than many of the smaller, local projects constructed over the last four years. Mr. Frugé comments on the reasoning behind this change and what it means for the future.

Q **Four years of small-scale CWPPRA projects have brought exceptional results in creating and restoring wetlands throughout southern Louisiana. Why the shift to large projects?**

A Placing more emphasis on larger projects is the next logical step in CWPPRA's evolution. Its original provisions called for us to fast-track projects that could be completed in five years. And we've done that with the smaller projects approved and built over the last few years. We've shown that our protection and restoration techniques can work. We've gained strong public support for the program. We've had the time to produce a

comprehensive restoration plan and begin evaluations of what's possible and what's not from a large-project standpoint. Now it's time to take what we've learned and start applying it to projects that will produce larger effects throughout coastal Louisiana.

Q **But smaller, local projects are still part of the CWPPRA effort?**

A Absolutely. Under our new funding approach, at least two-thirds of our annual funding will be dedicated to larger-impact, systemic projects, but the remaining funds will still go to smaller projects with more localized effects.

Q **How did you arrive at this two-thirds/one-thirds formula?**

A Part of the rationale grew out of the state's white paper published in early 1995. It proposed a CWPPRA funding allocation in thirds — one-third of the annual funding for small projects, one-third for river diversions, and one-third for barrier islands. After discussing this idea, the Task Force decided that rather than dedicate specific amounts to certain

types of projects, we would simply devote two-thirds of our annual appropriation to large-scale efforts. This distribution will get us where we need to be, but still provide us with the flexibility to fund those larger-impact projects that will produce the greatest wetland benefits.

Q **What do you mean by flexibility?**

A Well, for one year's priority list, for instance, we could decide to dedicate all of the two-thirds to river diversion projects that would reintroduce freshwater and sediment from the Mississippi into the marshes. For the next year's list, we might devote the two-thirds to a different mix of systemic-impact projects. We can adjust to take advantage of the best project opportunities.

Q **How do you differentiate between a small project and large project?**

A The Task Force recently defined large projects as generally, but not limited to, those that cost more than \$10 million. But it's important to remember that the

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