

**The 27th Annual Conference on the Environment
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**Remarks prepared for
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One of the challenges of serving as Administrator of EPA Region 6, is implementing national programs in 6 states whose landscapes and cultures are so diverse.

Implementing programs that make sense and accomplish what they're intended to do locally, but developed to address national objectives can be a challenge as many in the audience can appreciate.

The good news is, EPA and DEQ have learned through experience together, and one of the benefits of our shared experience is validating the importance of partnership in meeting our goals and objectives, many of which are shared.

I am very encouraged about the specific efforts EPA and DEQ leadership have made throughout the last year to expand and elevate the partnership progress. As you know, Governor Blanco has made partnership, cooperation and coordination a priority for her agency officials. I am pleased to say that the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality has embraced that policy with its primary federal partner, and we are very happy to play a role in achieving the Governor's environmental goals as stated in October of this year, and other initiatives that she has indicated are of high priority.

Today I'd like to give you a brief overview of how EPA is partnering with the State of Louisiana to improve the quality of life in Louisiana.

First, I'd like to talk about how EPA is helping to accomplish the three goals that Governor Blanco announced at your 20th year anniversary celebration this past October. Those goals addressed water quality, air quality and mercury in the environment, and I'd like to mention a few things EPA is doing to help achieve those goals.

First, Governor Blanco's goal of reducing by 25% the number of water bodies not meeting their designated uses by 2012. We are assisting the state in a comprehensive strategy for achieving this goal. Meeting this challenge will require multiple approaches, including assistance to communities and waste water treatment plant owners and operators, development of appropriate water quality standards, and consistent, persistent enforcement.

Region 6 staff is engaged in every one of these approaches, with two examples including the development of a regional action plan to aid in technical assistance and outreach to resolve technical and economic issues. The Region will host a regional forum this year to promote collaboration between regional, state and local regulators. Region 6 staff is also working with the DEQ staff and others to collect data and information to revise the

dissolved oxygen standards for naturally dystrophic waters to ensure we are using the appropriate standards in these waters. A broad range of activities will be required to meet these goals, and we are committed to partnering in them.

Second, the governor's goal of achieving National Ambient Air Quality Standards for the entire state, and specifically achieving ozone attainment for the 5 parish Baton Rouge area. EPA has been actively involved in this issue for many years. Currently, EPA is providing technical advice and support in addressing the remaining hurdles to area attainment. These resources range from staff expertise to special monitoring equipment for releases. We have also worked with DEQ on making the permitting process that regulates facilities more efficient.

Third, reducing mercury in the environment. EPA is working with DEQ to identify sources and ways of removing mercury from the environment. An example of a Region 6 activity in this area is an ongoing analysis of the mercury emission limits that are enforceable through the Clean Air Act, and we will share this analysis with the state when it is completed. We are also working with the state to develop an appropriate TMDL for mercury in coastal waters. We will continue to work with DEQ to develop a comprehensive mercury strategy for the state and identify additional roles EPA can play in this effort.

The Governor has also made the restoration of Louisiana's coastal wetlands a high priority issue for her administration. EPA has been a partner with 4 other federal agencies and the state in the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA, or otherwise known as the Breaux Act), since its passage in 1990. Since its passage, EPA has partnered with the state to design and construct 4 projects that have benefited 1,630 acres of coastal habitat. These projects have ranged from freshwater river re-introductions or diversions, to barrier island restoration. We recently celebrated the completion of a project on Timbalier Island. Eight are currently in the planning stages.

We are participants in the Louisiana Coastal Area planning and restoration effort, which is the larger scale initiative started under the Breaux Act to restore the coast. EPA is the sponsor of one of the large-scale projects identified for initial implementation in the near-term plan, the Bayou Lafourche Freshwater Reintroduction. This project will provide freshwater to the an area that has one of the highest documented land loss rates in the world, and prevent saltwater intrusion that will further deteriorate the fragile marshes in the Barataria Basin. We are very active participants in the efforts to rehabilitate Louisiana's coastal ecosystem

Many of the environmental issues Louisiana faces are challenges shared by the other four states that border the Gulf of Mexico. EPA, along with Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida share common problems, and, potentially common solutions. The Gulf of Mexico Program, is a partnership composed of other federal agencies, state agencies and other partners. The Program Office is located at the Stennis Space Center in Mississippi and administered by the EPA. Your DEQ Secretary, Mike McDaniel, is the

representative on the Policy Committee for the state of Louisiana. I believe that the Program will increasingly provide an avenue to better characterize the problems facing the gulf and its neighboring states, and provide paths to resolution of those problems. EPA believes that providing administrative support and participating in the program provides valuable assistance to Louisiana and the other Gulf states.

And finally, the last example of partnership I'd like to mention. We all know that to really move forward, the actions needed to accomplish our goals and objectives must be incorporated into both our priorities and daily activities. Region 6 is ensuring that issues that are important to the state are addressed in that manner. One of the most recent and straightforward examples is my 300 Day Plan released on February 22 of this year. A copy of the plan has been included in your conference packets. If you look at the plan, you'll notice references to or components of many of the goals and objectives I've previously mentioned. We are committed to helping you achieve your goals by making them shared goals and working toward them on a systematic basis.

There are few places where the link between the environment, culture and economy more apparent than in Louisiana. The resources with which you have been blessed have also in some case resulted in many of the challenges you now face.

Please know that the U.S. Environmental Protection agency, especially the staff at Region 6, are committed to helping the state of Louisiana achieve and maintain an even higher quality of life through the protection and restoration of your unique environment. You live, work and recreate in a special place, and we want to help you keep it that way.