

Responses Provided by Louisiana Department of Natural Resources Secretary Jack Caldwell

1) How important is the Coastal Zone Management program to the State of Louisiana? What benefits does your state derive from participation in the CZMA? Are there specific changes that need to be made to CZMA?

Response:

Importance

The Coastal Zone Management Program in Louisiana is entitled the “Louisiana Coastal Resources Program” (LCRP). The enabling legislation of the program is the State and Local Coastal Resources Management Act of 1978 (SLCRMA), and the state program was federally approved in 1980. At the time of its passage, SLCRMA constituted a major change in the way Louisiana managed its coastal resources. The research performed to establish the LCRP was largely responsible for the discovery of the severity of the coastal erosion problem, and many of its Coastal Use Guidelines (rules governing coastal uses) were crafted to address wetland loss issues.

Benefits

The LCRP has been successful in reducing adverse impacts to coastal resources while still allowing the economic engine of the coast to continue to run. The federal consistency component of the LCRP has helped Louisiana in its efforts to get federal agencies to assist the state in reducing coastal impacts and even in the beneficial use of dredged material. Local coastal management programs are also an important component of the LCRP, because they serve to manage coastal uses on a neighborhood level. Each local program also provides its citizens with a point of contact for all types of coastal issues, which has greatly facilitated the state’s coastal management and restoration outreach efforts. Although the road has sometimes been rocky, the LCRP has resulted in a local, state, and federal partnership in coastal zone management.

CZMA Changes

The Coastal Zone Management Act has been a great asset to the coastal states and territories. In particular, the federal consistency provisions have provided the states with an invaluable means to manage their coasts. Louisiana’s position on CZMA is that the Act should remain largely unchanged, with two exceptions - the Section 306 funding “cap” and Section 309.

The Section 306 (core program element) funding cap is routinely set at \$2 million during the appropriation process, which means that states which receive the maximum allocation, such as Louisiana, are not eligible to receive any additional Section 306 funding. This cap has been in place for 10 years, so there has been a decline in program support to many states due to inflation at a time when population growth, land use changes, and associated planning and permitting requirements have rapidly increased. The eight states which have been subject to the cap since 1992, including Louisiana, are also the states with the longest shorelines and greatest populations. Louisiana recommends that the CZMA reauthorization bill clearly and strongly should express the Congressional intent that there be no funding cap or that the cap should be

raised to a higher level in a way which is equitable for all participating states and territories.

Section 309 of CZMA provides for program enhancement. The concept is that state programs need to be periodically updated to keep them current with changing coastal conditions. In order to receive funding, states are required to assess their programs and develop strategies (five year plans) to enhance them. The federal funding which Section 309 provides does not require state matching funds, but it only provides federal funding for implementation of enhancements for two years. After the two year mark, the state must fund enhancements from its core program, which as indicated above, has a fixed funding cap. The effect of Section 309 over the years is that many states have added costs to their programs through Section 309 enhancements, which they are now required to implement without additional Section 306 program funding. Louisiana has just entered its third round of Section 309 enhancements and is significantly burdened with additional costs. Thus, Louisiana's position on Section 309 is that it is time to either modify it to provide permanent funding of enhancements or to eliminate it altogether. If Section 309 is retained, states should be provided the option of undertaking a broader range of activities and be relieved of the need for a "program change" to justify an activity under this section. We believe that there are many activities that states could undertake that would "enhance" their programs, but might not result in a "change" in the program. If Section 309 is eliminated, the monetary savings should be applied to Section 306.

2) Restoring Louisiana's wetlands is a costly and time-consuming effort. Considering all the other coastal areas around the nation that require coastal restoration, there is a question if we as a nation can afford to either afford them all or fund them all at the same time. Do you have any ideas about how we should go about prioritizing these restoration needs based on science rather than politics?

Response:

Louisiana's wetlands are part of one of the most unique and complex river delta systems in the entire world. In fact, the Mississippi River is the third largest river system in the world behind only the Amazon and the Nile River systems. Louisiana has 44% of the U.S. coastline bordering the Gulf of Mexico, and ranks third (behind Alaska and Florida) for miles of coastline in the entire United States. There are nearly 3.4 million acres of wetlands in coastal Louisiana which amounts to 28% of the total coastal marsh acreage in the United States.

A significant amount of national resources are linked to Louisiana's coastal wetlands making the health of this system of vital importance to the nation. The estimated value of Louisiana's coastal infrastructure exceeds \$48 billion. Louisiana and the adjacent offshore area contribute approximately 27% of the nation's natural gas supply that is valued at approximately \$10 billion per year. In 1998, 22% of all domestic oil and gas was produced by Louisiana. Petroleum products produced in Louisiana and the adjacent offshore area are valued at approximately \$17 billion annually. Louisiana coastal wetlands provide storm protection for ports that carry 16% of all waterborne commerce in the U.S. each year. Louisiana also accounts for the largest commercial fish and shellfish harvests in the contiguous United States. The annual economic effect of recreational marine fishing is approximately \$944 million.

Countless communities have made their livelihood on Louisiana's coastal natural resources. However, in the effort to harvest these resources from the coastal wetlands, human activity, including the dredging of oil and gas canals and navigation channels and the construction of an extensive river levee system, has dramatically altered the hydrology of the landscape. These changes together with natural geologic and hydrologic processes, such as subsidence, sea-level rise, and shoreline erosion, have resulted in massive losses of coastal wetlands. Currently, Louisiana accounts for 80% of the coastal wetland loss in the continental United States. Louisiana has lost over 924,400 acres of coastal wetlands in the past 50 years and is projected to lose nearly 630,000 acres of marsh over the next 50 years. The protection that these wetlands provide to coastal towns and cities is critical to minimize loss of life and property from tropical storms and hurricanes. In fact, in 1998, over 2 million residents, 46% of the state's population, resided in the coastal zone.

It is estimated that current restoration efforts will only address approximately 23% of the projected 50 year land loss in Louisiana. Moreover, the state of Louisiana has developed a series of ecosystem management strategies to adequately address wetland loss that carry a price tag near \$14 billion over the next 30 years. However, the benefits that Louisiana's wetlands provide to the nation through energy resources, recreation, industry, and local infrastructure is more than \$100 billion, a sizeable return on the cost of implementing planned restoration strategies. Only through an integrated, unified effort can the nationally significant resources that are Louisiana's coastal wetlands be preserved.