

US Commission on Ocean Policy
Port of New Orleans March 7, 2002

Welcome remarks from Dr. Len Bahr for Gov. Mike Foster

Greetings from Governor Mike Foster. He asked me to speak for him because I'm his coastal advisor, perhaps the only such position in the country - because we're the only state whose coast is under siege from upstream, from the ocean and from global change

Here's what S. Louisiana provides for the nation:

The largest port in the nation
The principal Oil and Gas portal for the nation
A principal fishery producer for the nation
A principal tourist/recreation destination for the nation

All four of these vital state and national economic engines are threatened by a combination of three (inter-related) issues: land loss; climate change (accelerated sea level rise); and Gulf hypoxia. Example, Scientific American article "Drowning New Orleans" Where you're sitting you're on some of the highest land in S Louisiana. One or two miles north of here you'd be on some of the lowest - about ten feet below sea level.

Slide of deltaic plain with projected land loss
Slide of Mississippi R. drainage basin and hypoxic zone

Governor Foster, who currently chairs Southern Governor's Conference, has taken on the challenge of mitigating against this crisis as a legacy issue for the last two years of his administration - putting a massive restoration/mitigation program in place that can't easily be overturned by a successor.

For example, his secretary of DNR Jack Caldwell will be among members of a panel after lunch that will outline our effort to address these problems with the largest environmental restoration program in history.

Louisiana is stepping up to the plate and developing a strategy for how we can pay our fair share of the \$14 billion cost of this effort (which will also help reduce hypoxia by perhaps 10-15%) and allow us to deal with accelerated sea level rise.

Tomorrow, the state and the Corps of Engineers will sign a cost share agreement to begin an 18 month effort to achieve congressional authorization for a comprehensive restoration program under WRDA.

On Saturday, Gary LaGrange and I will be on a panel at the Tulane Law School discussing the development of a state-of-the-art new port facility we will call the Millennium Port that will be designed to complement the restoration program. These are ambitious plans but they are realistic, we believe.

We're going to need lots of outside help, however. The first step is achieving national recognition for our crisis.

Again, welcome to New Orleans, have a good meeting and pay close attention because you'll be hearing about the most serious ocean-related issues in North America.