



Jaws restoration to begin

By Jennifer Boquet The Daily Iberian

BALDWIN - After seven years of planning, more than \$3 million has been approved to begin rebuilding the Louisiana coast near the Jaws.

The area near the Jaws, an inlet in the northeast portion of West Cote Blanche Bay where several canals empty, loses about 15 feet a year to erosion.

"That really is significant for that area. That area is still within the shadow of the influence of the Atchafalaya. The Atchafalaya area is actually building a delta, and here's an area experiencing loss," said John Foret, federal project manager.

Funding for the project, aimed at trapping sediment to build a marsh in the area, received approval at the April meeting of the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act task force. The entire project is expected to cost \$3,392,135.

"The main problem we have is shoreline erosion occurring in the bay. If one were to look at the bay, it doesn't have far to go before it becomes part of the Intracoastal Canal," Foret said.

However, Foret said the area is in a unique position, because officials can stop the erosion process and build the marsh using sediments already being deposited, rather than allowing the material to be dumped out into the bay.

"We're going to mimic the development of a river delta using the fresh water and sediments that are there," Foret said.

The project will take place over 2,782 acres, containing 182 acres of fresh marsh and 2,600 acres of open water.

The plan is to dredge 63,000 feet of distributary channels 60-feet wide and 6-feet deep. The channels will act as pathways to direct the water to go between 145 earthen terraces.

The dredged sediment will be used to build the terraces to block the wind and reduce the wave energy that is eroding the coast.

Bullwhip and Giant Cutgrass will then be planted on top of the terraces to trap the sediment and create a marsh.

"The plants will be planted for stabilization. For one, it gives us immediate marsh. Two, it stabilizes the dredged material on the terraces," Foret said. "By creating immediate marsh, we create immediate habitat for animals to utilize the marsh as part of the life cycle."

Foret said the project is also expected to improve water quality in the bay, although improving water quality is not the goal of the project.

Plans for the project began about seven years ago, but were stalled when both St. Mary Parish and Iberia Parish officials voiced concerns about the project.

"St. Mary Parish had some concern on the impacts of building a marsh to the possible flooding of Baldwin," Foret said.

Iberia Parish officials also expressed concern that areas of that parish that drained into the Charenton Drainage and Navigation Canal may flood.

"We went through and did a hydrologic model and presented it, and then the parishes understood it would not cause a problem," Foret said.

St. Mary Parish Councilman Paul Naquin, who represents the Baldwin area, said he expects the project to benefit the parish by speeding up the natural building process.

"It will help our area there. It will allow us to claim some land there," he said.

Now that funding for the project has been approved, NMFS will conduct a survey to locate any pipeline that may be buried in the area. If pipeline is identified the alignment of the channels may have to change.

Construction is expected to start on the project at the beginning of February, with bids going out in early January. The project is expected to be completed by the end of May 2004.

Naquin said the parish and the Port of West St. Mary is also working on getting an environmental impact study done for a project that would remove a build-up of sediment right at the mouth of the Jaws.

"The mouth of the Jaws is completely plugged up," he said.

Naquin said residents have voiced concerns about water that remains on their property after heavy rains.

"It's not just flooding, it's boat traffic, too," he said. "Our sportsmen have to go around. If it would be clear, they could go straight from the Charenton Navigation Canal to the bay."

Naquin said if all goes well, that project could begin early next year.

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After three years of waiting, the doors of the new Shadows-on-the-Teche visitors

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