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2theadvocate News

Private-public funding used to restore marsh

By AMY WOLD
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Advocate staff writer

PORT FOURCHON -- A coastal landowner with \$250,000 and a desire to restore some land damaged by last year's tropical storms put together partners and grants to grow the endeavor into a \$700,000 project that is now under way.



Advocate photo by A

The work -- planting seedlings, restoring water flow and protecting a thin strip of land from wind and waves -- was made possible with a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and help from the local community, private businesses and other government agencies.

Kristin Toth, a graduate student at the University of Kentucky, helps as a sand fence near Port Fourchon, South Louisiana. The fence is a component of a coastal restoration project in Lafourche Parish. Toth volunteered to work on the project through a connection with the University of New Orleans.

Several coastal restoration experts said that while the total acreage of marsh created may not be as much, such collaboration among public and private groups is key to offsetting the state's loss of coastal land.

Cathy Norman, land manager for Edward Wisner Donation Property, the nonprofit land trust started with \$250,000 set aside for land imp

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on property just east of Port Fourchon.

Wisner is a nonprofit land trust that owns more than 35,000 acres in the Baptist, Lafourche and Jefferson parishes. The land was donated Orleans in 1914 and has been managed to benefit 52 groups, including Salvation Army, Tulane University and the City of New Orleans.

Norman said she discussed the potential coastal restoration project with her husband, who said she should "leverage" the available money into a larger project. Her husband, Shea Penland, a coastal restoration scientist, is director of the Pontchartrain Institute for Environmental Sciences.

So, Norman said, she got in touch with NOAA's Community-based Coastal Restoration Program, which provides seed money to restoration projects. Multiple partners can be found to take part in the efforts.

Cheryl Brodnax, with the NOAA restoration center in New Orleans since the program started in 1996, 14 such projects have been done in Louisiana or are under way.

Norman already had the Greater Lafourche Port Commission and the University of New Orleans on board by the time she approached NOAA. Throughout the planning, other partners joined, including the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, National Resource Conservation Service, the Morris P. Hebert engineering firm, the Coastal Restore Coastal Louisiana and ChevronTexaco.

Not all provided money. But all are contributing, whether through financial volunteers or donating the use of heavy equipment.

The work now includes creating 45 acres of marsh, building shoreline protection along the bank of an eroding canal, breaking through an earthen levee to restore the interior marsh, installing 7,000 feet of sand fencing and planting 2,300 mangrove seedlings.

The fencing and mangroves, both of which keep the sandy soil from eroding, are planned for places along a thin strip of land that separates Chambeac from the Gulf of Mexico, an area damaged by storms last year.

Brian Kendrick, an engineer with Morris Hebert, said although creating 45 acres of marsh isn't much compared to the amount being lost every year, "every little bit counts."

"We're very ecstatic about doing these kinds of programs," Kendrick said.

He said the project is significant because the private landowner contributed a significant amount of the money for the work.

Norman said that once it started, the project seemed to grow on its o

"We need the rest of the country to see this and see that it can work said.

Others agree that such partnerships on coastal restoration are essent


"We depend on those partnerships because most coastal land is ow private owners," said Kerry St. Pe, director of the estuary program.

Ted Falgout -- executive director of the nearby Greater Lafourche I Commission, which donated the use of heavy equipment for the pro agreed.

"We have a lot at stake here in that the port is the dominant player in he said..

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