



Corps Hurricane Response

Task Force Hope Status Report

October 22, 2007

The Other Story of New Orleans

By Lewis E. Link, Ph.D.

Lewis "Ed" Link, Ph.D., is Director of the Interagency Performance Evaluation Taskforce, and a professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Maryland. Following is a letter Dr. Link wrote to the New York Times.

There has been a recent epidemic of negative stories and editorials on New Orleans, all having a common focus on the perceived dysfunctionality of past and / or ongoing activities, including a recent New York Times editorial. These articles paint an incorrect picture of unstructured and inept activities related to the hurricane protection systems. These misconceptions and innuendo are simply not true. Agreed, there is substance to many of the issues raised, but the context within which they are presented has been speculative and to paraphrase George Will, "often innocent of the facts." As Director of the Interagency Performance Evaluation Task Force for almost two years, I have perhaps been as close to the hurricane protection issues in New Orleans as anyone. I want to offer a more balanced perspective of the situation.

New Orleans, faced with the relentless forces of sea level rise, subsidence and possibly more energetic

future hurricanes, is at risk and will continue to be even after the currently planned 100-year protective measures are completed. But the risk today is much less than it was prior to Katrina due to the improvements completed so far. When the 100-year system is completed in 2011, it will be even better, and New Orleans will have the best protection it has ever had. At the 1% or 100-year frequency, the primary threat of flooding will be rainfall, not hurricanes. Given follow-on efforts to restore natural defenses (wetlands, barrier islands, etc.) in conjunction with structural measures, there are significant portions of the region that will be quite secure from future storms.

The hype that Katrina was an insignificant storm is bunk. Katrina was a 400-year meteorological event and created the highest surge to hit the U.S. and tied the highest recorded wave. It created a far more severe environment than CAT 5 hurricanes Camille or Dean.



Dr. Ed Link

There have been accusations that activities in New Orleans have been piecemeal and disorganized. This certainly can be the impression if looking at the situation superficially.

However, there is a sensible strategy at work. First, restore some level of protection by repairing Katrina's major damage - done. Second, strengthen the existing system to improve performance over the short term - under way. Third, build a significantly better capability as a platform for the future - 100-year protection scheduled for 2011. And fourth, examine and consider alternative approaches to providing higher levels of protection.

I have seen the frustration of many local, state and federal officials con-

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Find Out What's Happening In Your Backyard

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is hosting a series of public meetings to discuss progress of the 100-year hurricane protection system and the status of the environmental compliance efforts.

MEETING AGENDA

6:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. - Open House
7:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m. - Project Presentations
7:15 p.m. - Discussion

TUES., OCTOBER 23

Belle Chasse Auditorium
8398 Highway 23
Belle Chasse, LA 80037

WED., OCTOBER 24

Lynn Oaks School
#1 Lynn Oaks Drive
Braithwaite, LA 70040

THURS., OCTOBER 25

St. Maria Goretti Church
7300 Crowder Blvd.
New Orleans, LA 70127

Send written comments about the hurricane protection system in Jefferson and Orleans Parishes to:

Mail: Gib Owen, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, PM-RS
P.O. Box 60267, New Orleans, LA 70160

Phone: 504-862-1337 **Fax:** 504-862-2088

e-mail: mvnenviornmental@usace.army.mil

Web site comment submittals: www.nolaenvironmental.gov

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cerning the rate of progress, but I have yet to sense any lagging in the sense of urgency or relaxation of the horrendous pace that public officials and contractors have maintained to re-establish protection for New Orleans. Unfortunately, they are often saddled with policies and processes that were developed in the past for conditions and objectives considerably different than those faced in New Orleans today. Multiple layers of bureaucracy and competing priorities coupled with a very complex and urgent situation make for what certainly appears like sausage-making. The national water policies and processes that are at work in New Orleans are in as dire need of repair and replacement as the hurricane protection system. But this vehicle can not be easily rebuilt while it is in

the race of its life.

The IPET risk team, from industry, academia and government, has generated for the New Orleans area perhaps the most comprehensive engineering-based risk assessment of any large, distributed and complex infrastructure system. This work characterizes risk pre-Katrina, for current conditions, and for the 100-year system currently being designed. It provides a common picture of risk for the public and public officials of all levels. New Orleans is the only major metropolitan area in the country that has this kind of a clear picture of its risk - past, present and future. It is the only community that has the advantage of applying this unique knowledge to guide reconstruction and systematically reduce and mitigate risk. The information,

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Hurricane Protection Office

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Louisiana Recovery Field Office

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The *Status Report Newsletter* supports the information program for Task Force Hope and its stakeholders. It also serves as the primary tool for accurately transmitting the hurricane recovery work to stakeholders.

This is an online publication and open to public distribution.

This issue and past issues can be found at:

<http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/hps>

Comments and questions

may be sent to the

Status Report Newsletter editor at:

b2fwdpao@usace.army.mil

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available on <http://nolarisk.usace.army.mil> clearly shows a reduction in risk since Katrina and a dramatic reduction for the future.

The detailed analysis of the performance of the New Orleans hurricane protection system is available on the IPET web site <https://ipet.wes.army.mil>

Ed Link

Edward E. Link, Ph.D.



Introducing

Louisiana Levee School

*Looking for a
Common Language*



By Susan Spaht

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the City of New Orleans formed a commission called “Bring New Orleans Back!”. Three members of the Flood Protection and Drainage sub-committee of that commission – John Koerner (Chairman), Bruce Thompson and Billy Marchal – spent a lot of time post-Katrina talking with fellow businessmen and others to gather ideas and suggestions on what was needed in New Orleans to bring it back. It became clear to the group that rebuilding New Orleans meant everyone had to work together, form common goals, and speak in a common vernacular. The lack of a common language and understanding of scientific terms was especially apparent when discussions involved flood protection, drainage, coastal restoration and levees.

“Everyone involved in rebuilding our state’s flood protection and coastal restoration should be speaking in a common vernacular, which they weren’t,” said Bruce Thompson. “What we needed was a ‘levee school’ to teach everyone the same language.”

Dr. Robert Thomas of Loyola University put it this way: “Essential to building a sustainable Louisiana coastal zone is the creation of a decision-making process whereby pol-

icy makers, state agencies, engineers/scientists, and citizens are able to understand and communicate with each other. The economic well-being of Louisiana will never reach our lofty goals if trust and transparency in communication among stakeholders is not strengthened.”

The businessmen broached the idea of a “levee school” to Louisiana State University and to the secretaries of the state’s Department of Natural Resources and Department of Transportation and Development. Those state agencies picked up on the idea, and eventually decided that the courses should become mandatory for state employees involved in flood protection, drainage and coastal restoration.

The first session of the Louisiana Levee School, more formally, **The Flood Protection & Ecosystem Restoration Professional Development Program**, will be held on the LSU campus in Baton Rouge on Nov. 27- 30. It will be taught by Louisiana college professors, Corps of Engineers specialists and other experts in their fields. The first attendees will be members of the state’s levee boards and state employees who have been mandated to take the course.

Future quarterly sessions will be open to the public. Topics to be cov-

ered in the sessions will include:

- Flood protection policy and administration,
- Evolution of levee districts,
- Introduction to structural flood protection,
- Design, construction and maintenance of flood protection systems,
- Hydrology, inland flooding, natural hazard modeling, and climate forecasting,
- Non-structural approaches to managing flood risk and damage, and
- Risk communication and information dissemination.

According to Gov. Kathleen Blanco, who has endorsed the new school, “Louisiana Levee School was established in order to create both a common vernacular amongst the flood protection and ecosystem restoration professionals and their stakeholders, as well as to enhance the professionalism of these practitioners. Louisiana Levee School is a professional development training program that promotes an integrated approach to the management of our natural and manmade environments.”



To obtain more information on the Louisiana Levee School, go to this Web site: www.laseagrant.org/leveeschool.

Faces of Hope

Corps Archaeologists Really Dig Their Work

By Kimberly Powell

“Can you dig it?”

As a Corps of Engineers archaeologist, Mike Swanda answers this question – asked in one form or another – nearly every single day when the Corps weighs project requirements against the needs for accommodating historic preservation concerns. In an area rich in history and given the number of projects associated with the Hurricane Protection System – about 250 at this time – Swanda and his colleagues are exceptionally busy.

The Rodgers, Ark., native began his career with the Arkansas Archaeological Survey and Arkansas Historic Preservation Program before joining the Corps in 1991, working out of the Philadelphia District until he transferred to New Orleans in 2003.

Section 106 compliance

Swanda explains the reason the Corps has a team of archaeologists: “As a federal agency, we are required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 to evaluate the impact of our activities upon historic properties.” The broad term “historic properties” refers to cultural resources of archaeological, historical, underwater and architectural significance.

Archaeologists in the Natural and Cultural Resources Analysis section of the Environmental and Compliance branch work with Corps program managers in the early stages of project planning to identify historic properties potentially affected by construction work; assess its effects; and seek ways to avoid, minimize or mitigate any adverse effects on the properties.

“Working with Corps engineers,” Swanda says, “we determine possible impacts inherent in the entire project – from location of staging sites, actual activity, even



Corps archeologists Gary DeMarcey and Mike Swanda

where cars and trucks are parked. We find out if the land is an historical property – relying upon research and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Then, we investigate.”

If it's determined that the construction site in question is of historical significance, Swanda says, “we figure out the potential impact on the property. It could be that there's no effect, or no adverse effect, or that there is an adverse effect.

“When there's the possibility of an adverse effect, we look at options to avoid disturbing the historic property. If we can't accomplish the project without a negative impact, we explore options to mitigate them which may include data recovery of archaeological material or measured drawings, large format photography, and an abbreviated history of a structure.

When the work site touches upon bodies of water, such as borrow projects along Lake Pontchartrain, the team might encounter different sorts of historic properties, perhaps shipwrecks or Indian mounds. “When the proposed project involves water, it's a sophisticated process for which we use remote sensing devices to survey the site to confirm the presence of ships or boats. If one is

found, a dive is arranged to determine whether or not it's an historic or modern vessel.”

Respecting the past while building for the future

Gary DeMarcey, another Corps archaeologist, is currently involved in projects for marsh restoration and borrow pits in the “golden triangle” area adjacent to Lake Borgne. An Indian mound, along with human remains and pot shards were found recently, an occurrence that's not entirely unusual.

“When we find relics,” DeMarcey says, “we work with the tribe, in this case with the Chitimacha Tribe, to properly respect the tribe's wishes in disposition of the items. With respect to the prehistoric human remains, the Native American belief of letting natural processes predominate means that we leave the remains where they are found. At other times we curate relics with the Louisiana State Museum in Baton Rouge or at a facility that meets federal regulations.”

As the Corps moves forward in its mission to provide a hurricane protection system that will provide a 100-year level of protection, archaeologists like Swanda and DeMarcey ensure the work is carried out in a way that respects our past and our cultural resources.

