

**White House Tour
Comments for Col. Peter Rowan
September 26, 2002**

Gentlemen,

Thanks for taking the time to visit south Louisiana, a region known the world over for its food, architecture, music, festivals and rich Cajun culture.

I'll begin my statement this morning by referencing the Chief of Engineers' Environmental Operating Principles. These principles are built on the recognition that man's very life depends on the physical environment. We require its bounty—fresh air to breathe, clean water to drink, food to eat. However, man's increasing use of nature's bounty has made the environment more dependent on man to preserve it.

These basic principles make evident the need for today's leaders to integrate natural resource laws, values and environmental practices into the Corps' work ethic. Our challenge is to assure that everyone adjusts their attitude regarding environmental responsibilities, thereby changing an organization's culture over time.

How do we achieve change? We adjust our plans and our designs, to incorporate environmental responsibilities, stewardship and restoration of our nation's natural resources in everything we do. This culture change is evident in our efforts in the Everglades, Cal-Fed and now South Louisiana.

By now, you are familiar with the catastrophic land loss rate in south Louisiana. The dependence of the nation on Louisiana's oil and gas production and the importance of the Lower Mississippi River ports to international trade cannot be underestimated. These facilities are at risk. The unique cultural heritage found in south Louisiana is richly interwoven with the abundant resources found in the state's coastal regions. This culture is at risk.

We began restoration work in Louisiana in 1990 with the passage of the Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act, referred to as the Breaux Act. This act provides up to \$50 million each year for coastal restoration projects. Almost 100,000 acres of wetlands have been preserved through Breaux Act projects.

We've made strides through the Breaux Act. The New Orleans District commander serves as chairman of the Breaux Act Task Force, representing five federal agencies and the state of Louisiana. Together we've built strong and lasting partnerships with other agencies and stakeholders. We've gained extensive know-how...what works and what needs to be done. We've gained valuable insight into the enormity of the problems faced by Louisiana. What lies ahead requires even greater commitment.

In Louisiana, the Corps' New Orleans District possesses the widespread talent and ability to lead large restoration efforts and be successful. Almost a year and a half ago, we started action to convene under one roof a team of engineers and scientists from the state's Department of Natural Resources and other federal agencies. We now have 40 district employees and some seven other federal and state offices represented. They have one goal: to work on a comprehensive plan to stop coastal erosion.

We completed a reconnaissance report May of 1999. We started the feasibility phase with multiple studies in March 2000. Because of the time involved in a basin by basin approach, we decided to go with a comprehensive study and refocus on the Coast 2050 strategies. The mechanism to do that was the Louisiana Coastal Area Comprehensive Coast-wide Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study (LCA). It is estimated that restoration efforts will total \$14 billion over the next 30 years. We are currently required to submit a preliminary draft report in July 03 and are seeking WRDA 04 authorization.

Other feasibility studies under the LCA include the Miss River Delta Management Feasibility Study and the Atchafalaya Reef Feasibility Study. These other components of the LCA are recognized as a priority and are being advanced.

Let me clarify that participation in coastal restoration activities is not limited to the collocated team members. Virtually everyone in the district will support in one way or another restoration activities.

Features consistent with coastal restoration strategies are being incorporated into our navigation, hurricane protection and flood control projects. For example, the Morganza to the Gulf project, the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, Davis Pond and the coast- wide hurricane protection study either includes or will include restoration features.

Now, it is imperative that all stakeholders speak with one voice. It is critically important that agreement exists within the federal community, that the state of Louisiana continue to express its willingness as a sponsor, that a dialogue exists between the Corps and the environmental groups. The district has met many times with the green groups to discuss how they, the Corps, and the state can work together.

The Corps is the largest public engineering organization in the world and the nation's leading water resources agency. We have a critical mission in south Louisiana, providing flood control, navigation and environmental engineering projects that ensure the safety and economic prosperity of its citizens. The New Orleans District enjoys a firmly rooted presence in Louisiana with the largest civil works mission in the Corps. We stand ready to provide the technical expertise and capabilities required to support coastal restoration efforts in Louisiana. Obtaining consensus and funding support is critical to our success.

Loss of coastal wetlands is the nation's most significant environmental issue. Only through an integrated, mass-scale effort from federal, state and local agencies, and a full-fledged commitment from our sponsor, the state of Louisiana, from stakeholders, academia, leaders and legislators can we achieve a legacy of ecosystem diversity, economic prosperity and a unique way of life for Louisiana and the nation.