

AWRA Presentation
May 14, 2002

Slide 1

The Corps of Engineers has entered into an exciting partnership with the state of Louisiana to take on the challenge of restoring coastal Louisiana. I will be addressing what large-scale actions can be done to address the problem. It will take the active participation of many other individuals and groups to make this a success.

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As Steve mentioned, I am District Engineer of the New Orleans District. The district, shown in blue, geographically covers the southern half of the state of Louisiana, approximately 19 million acres. Nearly one-half of this makes up the coastal zone of Louisiana.

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The previous speakers have discussed some of the resources that are being lost and those that are in jeopardy of being lost in the future. The effects of natural processes, such as subsidence and storms, have combined with human actions to produce a system on the verge of collapse.

The construction of levees and canal (shown in yellow and green) played a major role in this loss. Such public works projects were built to protect and support nationally important infrastructure, navigation routes, and energy supplies. The country's need for these assets remains strong. However, meeting these needs is extracting a heavy price from Louisiana.

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The biggest question we often face is: can the problem of the loss of coastal wetlands be stopped? Are there solutions that are feasible from an engineering, environmental, and public acceptability standpoint? Are there practical solutions that meet institutional requirements, funding and affordability limits, and local, state, and national priorities?

The answer is a resounding YES! Recent evaluations have shown that Louisiana's wetlands can be restored to a sustainable level. The engineering and science exist today to fix this problem.

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Many events have occurred to bring us to where we are today. And these efforts provide the basis and foundation for our current efforts. Some important milestones include: State funding, the 1990 Breaux Act, the Dec 1998 Coast 2050 Plan, 1999 approval of a reconnaissance report based on the Coast 2050 Plan, and two feasibility studies in the Barataria Basin initiated in 2000.

This year, we will initiate feasibility studies to seek programmatic authority to construct the projects that will adequately address coastal wetlands loss and ultimately provide a sustainable coastal ecosystem that will preserve Louisiana and a national treasure.

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This pie chart shows that we need to incorporate a big change in our approach if we are to be successful.

The reason? Current efforts address less than 1/3 or about 28% of the problem. To initiate projects that are needed to address the other 72%, we must pursue funding under the Water Resources Development Act process. This is the only process that can deliver the funding necessary to build some of the larger multi-billion projects needed.

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First, what types of projects are necessary to get us there?

The strategies identified in our reconnaissance report and the original Coast 2050 Report reflect 4 major types of projects. The reintroduction of sediments through river diversions; constructing wetlands directly; restoring barrier islands and protecting the shorelines; and restoring hydraulic flows to maximize marsh health can be thought of as tools to get the job done.

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This slide presents the Coast 2050 Plan as a basis for the reconnaissance report, and shows a laundry list of strategies that should be implemented if we are to restore the coast. These strategies are still preliminary and require a great deal more evaluation and effort to make them a reality. The cost of all of these measures is estimated to be some \$14 billion. We must begin a landscape-scale program that attacks the root causes of the problem.

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(Title slide...no text.)

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We must make good the action items listed on the screen if we are to be successful in a comprehensive LA coastal restoration effort.

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Historically, the nation placed a priority on flood control and river management in the Mississippi Valley. We now know that in order to preserve these investments we must preserve the coastal landscape that protects them. It is therefore entirely appropriate that the Corps of Engineers, an agency that has served and assisted the nation in developing the flood control and navigation resources of the Mississippi River, take a leadership role in federal actions to produce a sustainable coastal Louisiana.

As I said earlier, this project is enormous and will require the resources and brain trust of many. We are putting together a strategy to accomplish this that engages as many players as possible.

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To that end we brought many of the participants together in one place, under one roof. This is the first time the New Orleans District has engaged in a collocated team. Significant agency support and effort is directed at the Louisiana Coastal Area Study. In addition, the Corps' Breaux Act team has collocated as well. The current 35-member team is expected to grow as we move from study to design to construction.

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Our goals for this upcoming Water Resource and Development Act is to seek authorization of a federal task force that would assist in the implementation of this large restoration effort. We're also seeking direction to complete a comprehensive study of the coast to use as a road map for the task force to follow. We are seeking Programmatic Authorization in WRDA 04. This type of authorization recognizes the project concept, provides funding, and delegates implementation decisions to the agency.

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The goals of the LCA effort are critical to the entire nation. With LCA projects in place, we expect to:

- Prevent the loss of 1,000 square miles of America;
- Prevent the loss of thousands of American jobs;
- Maintain the flow of oil and gas to the rest of the U.S;
- Maintain 30% of continental U.S. fisheries; and
- Preserve a unique culture.

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To be successful, we need a commitment from all entities listed on the screen. Recently, the Chief of Engineers issued the Corps' Seven Environmental Principles, and in the process reaffirmed the high value the Corps places on environmental issues in all of our work.

Over the last six months, we have had several meetings with Corps leadership to discuss the national significance of the wetland loss problem and the federal role in the solutions. One comment made...the Everglades is up and running. It is now time for the nation to focus on coastal Louisiana.

Thank you.