

EXAMINING THE EFFICIENCY OF COASTAL RESTORATION IN LOUISIANA

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The Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) has been the largest single source of restoration funding in Louisiana for the past two decades, providing more than half a billion for projects since 1991. However, recent evaluations of CWPPRA indicate that the annual level of program spending constitutes less than 10% of the funding required to sustain coastal Louisiana as it exists today. This constraint, combined with obvious need to maximize restoration benefits, provides the rationale for an examination of program cost-efficacy. A descriptive analysis of all authorized projects (n=109) was conducted to examine the costs and benefits associated with various attributes (e.g., location, technology, and sponsor). Results of the analysis indicate that barrier island and shoreline protection projects have become preferred restoration approaches under the program in recent years. Nevertheless, such projects have proven to be the most expensive and least efficient according to the Wetland Valuation Assessment (WVA) method established by CWPPRA as the primary construct for project selection. A binary logit analysis was used to examine how cost-efficacy and other project attributes affected selection of candidate projects (n=299). As suspected, cost efficacy - expressed as dollars per Average Annual Habitat Unit (\$/AAHU) - was found to be negatively related to project selection during the initial years of the program (1991-1995). During recent years (1999-2005), however, \$/AAHU has become positively correlated project selection. This presentation concludes with some possible explanations and implications of the recent discounting of efficiency as a project selection determinant within the CWPPRA program.