



Everything New Orleans

Advancing Louisiana's coastal plan: An editorial

Published: Friday, May 25, 2012, 8:42 AM



By **Editorial page staff, The Times-Picayune**

Louisiana's blueprint for saving our shrinking coastline **was adopted by the state Legislature this week**, and that's a significant step forward in the state's fight to survive.



RUSTY COSTANZA / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE archive

Marsh erodes into Bay Jimmy in February.

The Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority conducted public hearings around the state for nearly three months, listening to local concerns, making changes and presenting the final version of the coastal master plan to lawmakers.

The end result is a 50-year, \$50 billion plan that addresses hurricane protection and **coastal restoration** through a multiple lines of defense strategy. For the first time, Louisiana has identified specific, large-scale projects, winnowed down from 1,500 ideas.

The projects were evaluated on two factors: how well they reduce flood risk and how well they build

or maintain new land. Those are the right priorities, and a statewide survey on the plan makes it clear that Louisianians agree with its goals.

The coastal master plan begins to draw an explicit map of the state's expected future coastal landscape -- another first for Louisiana.

Now, Louisiana needs the money to make that vision a reality, and that relies in large measure on Congress adopting the Restore Act in its transportation spending bill. Sending 80 percent of the Clean Water Act fines assessed in the BP oil spill to Gulf Coast states would provide a significant infusion of money for this bold blueprint.

House Bill 812, by Rep. Simone Champagne, anticipates Congress doing so and would put a constitutional amendment before voters to dedicate those fines to the Coast Protection and Restoration Fund. That bill, which unanimously passed the House, now awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

Louisiana is doing its part to tackle this enormous challenge, and that's encouraging. Now, we need Congress to act.

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Letter: Act to help revive La. Gulf Coast

Two years after the BP oil spill, the Louisiana Gulf Coast has reached a tipping point. It is on the cusp of the most ambitious conservation and economic restoration effort in its history.

Some Louisianians have serious questions about how this effort will end. Some Louisianians feel as though they'd been cast adrift after hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and again when they were victimized by the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The state's challenges remain huge.

The RESTORE Act is a good place to start to begin the healing. It is intended to guarantee that 80 percent of the penalty money resulting from the oil spill goes to restoration projects in Louisiana and its Gulf Coast neighbors.

Getting the federal government to accept its share of the responsibility has been a tough task, but with the Congress poised to act, the stage is set to make that vision a reality. And we applaud the elected officials who have knocked down barriers and tossed aside partisan politics in the interests of Louisiana and its Gulf Coast neighbors.

At the same time, the Louisiana Legislature is considering — and needs to approve — the 2012 Coastal Master Plan, which lays out a road map for how incoming dollars best can be put to use.

Most of us struggle to plan a week or a year out. It's tough to embrace a 50-year vision for protecting and restoring the coast. But that's how you change the courses of rivers — and history. The plan is crucial to the future of the entire state and uses a sophisticated approach to make the best use of limited resources to provide the most protection and best restoration along the coast.

The one-two impact of the RESTORE Act and the 2012 Coastal Master Plan not only will protect Louisiana and its neighbors and make them stronger and better able to withstand natural and man-made disasters, it also will make Louisiana a leader in preparing the entire country for the projected sea level rises of the next half century and building a more secure future for our communities and our children.

The National Audubon Society stands with Louisiana and is fighting for Louisiana on the national stage — both because our roots are deep here and because what happens in Louisiana affects the rest of the nation.

The rest of America needs to make sure we don't let down Louisiana and the Gulf Coast. We have the greatest opportunity we've ever had to restore and improve the coastline for humans and wildlife, and for the economy and the environment. This is the first time we've glimpsed that moment. Let's not let it pass.

David Yarnold, president and CEO

National Audubon Society

New York, N.Y.

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Thank you for your input

Published: Sunday, April 15, 2012 at 6:01 a.m.

BISCO is a local, nonprofit, grassroots organization working to improve the lives of residents in southeastern coastal Louisiana.

Our mission includes building up the capacity and voices of every day people to address issues of importance to them, to make their communities safer, healthier and sustainable.

We want to thank the many people who attended our community-wide forums to learn more about the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority's proposed Louisiana 2012 Master Plan.

We especially want to thank those who made the extra effort to fill out one of our comment forms or to send in their own personal comments.

In all, the CPRA received over 2,200 comments on their draft plan, and we are proud to say that BISCO and these local residents played a valuable role in providing the CPRA with solid, heartfelt comments for the inclusion of projects that will benefit our area into the future.

Those comments were heard, and the final draft of the Master Plan includes more marsh restoration projects for Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes, as well as other needed projects. While Terrebonne and Lafourche will still need to work for more land-building and risk-reduction projects into the future, this is a really good start for this vital region of the state and country.

It is so rewarding to see the voices of local people raised in unity to request changes in the best interests of their communities, and then to see those voices be recognized and respected, with adaptations made based on those voices. This is the epitome of our mission.

We thank the CPRA and all of those who have worked so passionately for building a framework upon which we can base our long and arduous journey to coastal restoration and resilience.

We know adaptations will still need to be made, but we truly appreciate the effort of everyone involved.

Sharon Gauthé

BISCO executive director

Patty Whitney

BISCO environmental specialist

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Everything New Orleans

Putting a priority on Louisiana's coast: An editorial

Published: Wednesday, April 04, 2012, 8:24 AM



By **Editorial page staff, The Times-Picayune**

A **statewide survey** on the state's 2012 Coastal Master Plan sends a strong message to lawmakers: Pass it.



David Grunfeld, The Times-Picayune archive

Marsh erosion because of saltwater intrusion was photographed in St. Bernard Parish in November 2008

Eighty-six percent of the 801 Louisianians surveyed by Southern Media & Opinion Research said they support a legislative vote for the plan. An even higher number of respondents -- 91 percent -- said the coast and wetlands are very important to Louisiana.

The plan's individual goals -- **protecting coastal areas from hurricane flooding**, building coastal land, producing fisheries, protecting the area's culture and jobs along the coast -- got nearly universal support in the survey.

The state could already make a strong case for the master plan, but these survey results should help persuade lawmakers to support it. The poll, which

was sponsored by the National Audubon Society, shows "Louisiana voters feel strongly that our state's coastal areas and wetlands are crucial to our future," said Buster McKenzie, president of Southern Media.

A healthy coast is vital to all of us, no question about that.

The 50-year, \$50 billion plan addresses both hurricane protection and coastal restoration in a "multiple lines of defense" strategy. It includes rebuilding barrier islands, beachfronts and wetlands to reduce the effects of storm surge and calls for improving levees in highly populated areas to protect from surges caused by 500-year hurricanes. It also creates a long-term program for raising buildings out of potential flood areas or buying them outright.

The Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority spent nearly three months listening to public input on the master plan and added levee projects in response to concerns that some communities were being left out.



Everything New Orleans

Adopt Louisiana's coastal restoration blueprint: An editorial

Published: Monday, March 26, 2012, 7:55 AM



By **Editorial page staff, The Times-Picayune**

The state's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority spent nearly three months listening to public input on its coastal master plan and making changes before **voting unanimously this week to adopt it**. Now the **50-year, \$50 billion plan**, which addresses both hurricane protection and coastal restoration, heads to the state Legislature, and lawmakers should adopt this important road map for our future.



Kari Dequine, The Times-Picayune archive

Bags and planted marshes were in 2010 along Pass a Loutre to help prevent erosion.

The plan identifies for the first time specific large-scale projects and begins to draw an explicit map of the state's expected future coastal landscape. The authority used two primary factors to decide which projects to include: how well they reduce flood risk and how well they build or maintain new land.

"Every community gets protection under this plan," said Garret Graves, the authority's chairman. "No one is left out, and no one is left behind."

Concerns about being left out fueled some dissent at hearings. Slidell and other north shore

communities, as well as the Lafitte area, felt they were receiving insufficient protection. The plan now addresses that by including \$75 million to design a barrier and surge gate structure at the Chef Menteur and Rigolets passes and building an \$81 million ring levee at Slidell. The Lafitte area would also get an \$870 million ring levee.

Some of the most vocal opposition to the master plan has come from fishers, who fear that river diversions will put too much freshwater in coastal marshes, hurting their industry. Diversions are a critical part of the 50-year plan, but the revised draft attempts to assuage those worries by assuring fishers that there will be fewer diversions early in the life of the plan and that they will be operated in concert with marsh creation, ridge reconstruction and other work.

"There's been this belief out there, and it's our fault, that the diversions would pull potentially a million cubic feet of

water or more off the river on a daily basis, and there would be a constant flow through the diversions," Mr. Graves said.

Legislative approval of the plan is the next step, but funding will be critical, too. The authority is counting on Louisiana's share of fines from the BP oil spill as well as an increased share of federal offshore oil revenues, which kicks in 2017.

Louisiana must have bold, large-scale action to save its coast from certain destruction. This plan provides that.

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Public input seems to pay off

Published: Tuesday, March 20, 2012 at 8:55 a.m.

When state officials unveiled the new master coastal plan envisioning the next five decades of work, local folks raised concerns.

Most notably, the master plan contained little in the way of land building in the most-populated parts of Terrebonne Parish.

While the plan does include billions of dollars to complete and upgrade levee systems, much of the restoration work is focused in parts of Terrebonne where there are few people at risk from future flooding.

To the state's credit, the original plan was a draft, and part of the process was introducing it to coastal residents and officials and monitoring their feedback.

That process seems to have resulted in some changes — a fact that could make the resulting plan more palatable to the people here who will have to live with it for years to come.

The good news here is that the planners have shifted some of the projects from western Terrebonne to areas closer to more people. That means those projects are more likely to build protective land between our homes and businesses and the Gulf of Mexico.

The even better news is that the state officials who are overseeing this project are willing to listen to and accommodate legitimate local concerns.

The master plan itself is an accomplishment. It puts a number of smaller projects into a statewide system of priorities with an eye toward achieving the greatest overall good.

The plan envisions a system of state spending that would put about \$1 billion a year for 50 years into coastal restoration and flood protection.

The laudable idea behind it is to have a plan in place once there is a reliable stream of money that can be devoted to maintaining the viability of Louisiana's coast as a place to live and work for the coming decades.

It is important to remember, though, that the plan itself does not make any of the money the state needs a reality. But there is good news on that front as well. The U.S. Congress has inched ever closer to passing the Restore Act, which would dedicate much of the fines from the BP oil spill to work along the Gulf Coast.

As for the plan, it will be vital for Louisiana to speak with one voice on coastal issues. So local communities across the coast will have to get behind a plan.

To the extent that the changes to that plan make local cooperation more likely, they are welcome.

As long as local and state officials can work together and address the pressing



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concerns of the people, the plan will have an excellent chance of finding favor and — provided enough money can be secured — bringing success.

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Breaking News:

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Tuesday, July 24, 2012

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Coastal restoration, protection should concern all in Southwest Louisiana

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Brief

If there's one clear message from area residents to the agency charged with preserving and restoring Southwest Louisiana's coast and wetlands, it's that we're all in this together. That's the recurring theme in comments made ...

If there's one clear message from area residents to the agency charged with preserving and restoring Southwest Louisiana's coast and wetlands, it's that we're all in this together.

That's the recurring theme in comments made to the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority after it unveiled last month its \$50 billion, 50-year plan to rebuild Louisiana's coast and marshes.

For our area, the biggest project would be construction of a 44-mile levee that would start north of Moss Lake and ring the Calcasieu Ship Channel, Prien Lake and Lake Charles, and also veer eastward and westward to protect Lake Charles and Sulphur. The levee system would protect Calcasieu Parish from a 500-year flood.

Needless to say, construction of a levee 30-40 miles to their rear can't be the most comforting thought for residents of coastal Cameron Parish.

Construction on such a levee would not begin for at least 20 years.

In the meantime, there's other work to be done.

Cameron Parish officials made the case that the first line of defense the CPRA should focus on the coast.

"We cannot afford to lose any more of this shoreline," Cameron Parish Administrator Tina Horn told CPRA officials.

A \$45 million shoreline protection project, calling for the pumping of sediment from the Gulf of Mexico onto a 9-mile stretch of shore west of the Ship Channel should get under way later this year.

Marsh restoration projects also must be part of the formula. Approved projects include diverting fresh water from the Intracoastal

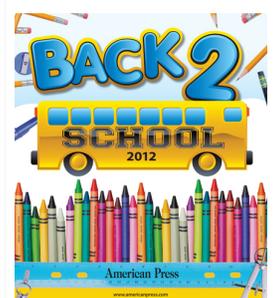
Waterway in an effort to rebuild 22,000 acres of marsh north of Cameron and Creole, using sediment from the Calcasieu Ship Channel to restore 319 acres of marsh north of Hackberry and using sediment from the Ship Channel or Big Lake to rebuild 609

acres of marsh near Grand Bayou.

These projects are just as critical as a levee system to Calcasieu Parish because the marshes of Cameorn Parish act as shock absorber for hurricanes, consuming storm surge and wind energy and reducing its fury.

Lake Charles Mayor Randy Roach pointed out that Calcasieu, Cameron and Jeff Davis parishes are linked by our hydrology. Hence, these projects should not be viewed as us versus them, but efforts to save our coast, our wetlands and our homes and businesses.

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Everything New Orleans

Working together to save Louisiana's coast: A letter to the editor

Published: Wednesday, February 15, 2012, 5:57 AM



Letters to the Editor

By

The Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority's 2012 Master Plan has received a lot of attention and stirred many emotions. First and foremost, as the president of Plaquemines Parish, I endorse CPRA's initiative in this regard.

While the plan is extensive, it acknowledges that additional projects will be needed to protect Louisiana's coast. Our comments to date have been offered in a manner to ensure local participation. In fact, the plan states that it will provide the framework for coastal restoration activity and that local projects of interest will be included as improvements are made to protect our coast and communities.

Plaquemines Parish stands with CPRA in its interest and commitment to protect our coastline. While the debate has been heated, the commitment of all participants is the same.

We all acknowledge that an asserted and deliberate effort must be made to restore the coast of Louisiana, its communities, residents and businesses. In this regard, we stand shoulder to shoulder with all who share this commitment and look forward to working with CPRA in this regard.

Billy Nungesser

Plaquemines Parish President

Belle Chasse

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Our Views: Get behind Louisiana coastal plan

The sheer size of Louisiana's coastal crisis has, in a perverse way, limited this state's response to one of its most pressing challenges. The problem of coastal erosion is so big, with Louisiana losing at least 16 square miles of land each year, that politicians, policymakers and the general public couldn't seem to get their hands around the task they faced — and how to tackle it.

But a new coastal restoration and protection plan developed by the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority is a step in the right direction. The plan, which has gained the support of a cross-section of experts who have dealt with coastal protection for years, deserves support from other quarters, too. We hope that the governor and state lawmakers can work together to advance the plan, which will require legislative approval to become a reality.

The public comment period on the plan will continue through Feb. 25. The public can read the plan at <http://www.coastalmasterplan.louisiana.gov/2012-master-plan/draft-2012-master-plan/>. The public comment period is intended to provide insights that might be used to tweak the plan before it heads to the Legislature, but it's important to remember that no plan of this scale is going to make everyone happy.

The hard choices in this plan are a long-awaited acknowledgment that coastal restoration cannot be all things to all people. This is a \$50 billion blueprint for restoring and protecting the coast over the next 50 years, assuming the cost will be paid by a mix of federal and state funds. Given the price tag, a strong federal role in funding this plan is vital.

The plan requires a lot of money, but not nearly enough to save all areas of the coast that have been damaged. The plan uses sound science to set priorities, directing spending where it can do the most good.

Sustained funding for coastal restoration and protection on this scale is far from guaranteed. In a time of fiscal austerity at both the federal and state levels, this kind of spending could prove a hard sell. But without a credible plan that demonstrates the state's seriousness in facing this ecological crisis, the prospects for funding will be even worse.

A major factor in the state's eroding coastline has been the levee system built around the Mississippi River over generations. The levees have limited the sweep of the river, diminishing its ability to bring sediment downstream and nourish the coast. This new

plan would include diversion projects that bring some of that sediment back to the areas that need it the most.

“It’s a template through which we can make a convincing case to the rest of the nation,” David Muth, of the National Wildlife Federation, said of the plan.

“I’ve worked on past plans, and they weren’t worth the paper they were written on,” said Paul Kemp, a scientist with extensive experience in coastal restoration who works in Louisiana on behalf of the National Audubon Society.

Kemp stressed that the plan now being promoted by CPRA is different, offering specific choices and proven strategies to restore the coast. “The good news is that we can actually reverse land loss,” Kemp told a recent meeting of Advocate reporters and editors.

These kinds of victories require cooperation in pursuit of a common goal. That’s why it’s so important that lawmakers and the governor approve this plan, and move forward.

Nothing is final yet in coastal plan

Published: Saturday, February 11, 2012 at 6:01 a.m.

When state officials showed up in Houma last month to present a draft of the 50-year plan for Louisiana's coast, they got a cool reception.

Reacting to what they perceived as a lack of land-building projects for much of Terrebonne Parish, many of the local residents who turned out for the public hearing voiced their displeasure with the plan.

That back-and-forth between the officials who are working on the plan and the people who will have to live with it is an integral part of the entire process.

That does not mean the plan will necessarily change. But it will not necessarily remain as it is, either.

"I'd say to the people of Terrebonne: Don't give up on us, because we're not giving up on you," said Jerome Zeringue, head of the state Office of Coastal Protection and Restoration.

Zeringue, who is from Terrebonne Parish and lives in Houma, presented much of the information at the meeting, so he got to see firsthand some of the concerns local people shared.

Those concerns could not have come as a surprise. With the most-populated parts of Terrebonne without significant land-building projects, the plan was sure to cause some worry.

More important than the current shape of the plan, though, is the fact that so many people turned out to participate in the information exchange.

Dozens came to the meeting in Houma, both to gather as much knowledge about the plan as possible and to offer their suggestions on how to improve it.

Unfortunately, the plan — as ambitious as it is — is limited by the assumptions it makes about how much money state leaders will be willing and able to commit to the coast in the coming decades.

Those assumptions might turn out to be unrealistic. With any luck, they will be low and the state will have more than the \$50 billion the plan assumes it will have over the next 50 years.

With the limitations it has, though, there will be wins and losses for every section of the coast.

Our section, for instance, has millions dedicated to levees, according to the plan as it now stands, but there is less for land building than many would prefer.

The crafting of a plan is a process, though, one that occurs with the input of the public, not in spite of it.

You can read the plan and offer comments on it through Feb. 25 at www.coastalmasterplan.la.gov.

You can also mail comments to Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana, 450 Laurel St., Suite 1200, Baton Rouge, LA 70804-4027.

Be a part of the process that results in the most-ambitious plan for our coast that has been crafted to date.

None of the details are settled yet, and you have every chance you could want to help settle them. Take advantage of it.

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OPINION

They were right

Prophetic words from those who have been forced to decide whether to stay and face more flooding or leave for higher ground.

Keith Magill

Executive Editor

Published: Sunday, January 29, 2012 at 4:00 p.m.

Residents' and politicians' outrage over the state's latest plan to limit damage from hurricanes and an eroding coast was understandable and predictable.

What was surprising about Tuesday's public hearing on the draft master plan was the great attendance. Several hundred people showed up at the Houma-Terrebonne Civic Center, and the consensus among them was that the plan fails to do everything it should to rebuild vanishing wetlands that protect inland communities from flooding. Residents of the area's bayou communities, and the politicians who represent them, want assurances they are not being consigned to the sea.

State officials, to their credit, have not minced words in describing the plan's emphasis, at least in Terrebonne and Lafourche, on reinforcing levees, rebuilding barrier islands, elevating and flood-proofing buildings and asking the most flood-prone residents to voluntarily sell their homes and move to higher ground. And all of it is overshadowed by an unfortunate but brutal truth: We have limited time and money to do something big before the Gulf turns most of Terrebonne, Lafourche and coastal Louisiana into Atlantis.

"It's easy to say a chicken in every pot — to promise everything to everyone," said Jerome Zeringue, executive director of the state's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority and a resident of Houma. "But the truth simply is that we can't afford to do that."

I've lived in south Louisiana almost all of my life, and I share some of the emotional ties to the people and the land that many passionate about saving the coast expressed during Tuesday's hearing. My heart tells me everyone should be saved, but my head says that is impossible. To their credit, state coastal officials have crafted a plan, however difficult to accept, whose actions result from critical thinking rather than pandering to emotion and political pressure.

I'm still digesting the implications, but here are a few things I've gleaned so far:

The message has changed: Most of what politicians and coastal advocates have delivered to the masses over the decades this problem festered has given too many people false hope that the coast can be "restored." Never mind that nobody defined



La. Coastal Restoration and Protection Authority

A map contained in the latest draft of Louisiana's plan to save its coast shows what would happen within 50 years if nothing but what is already under way is undertaken.

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exactly what that meant; it's what everyone wanted to hear and what many blissfully accepted.

State officials are now giving us a dose of reality. The medicine may be hard to digest, but it is what we need to save ourselves. The reframing is evident in the language the plan's advocates use. The plan focuses on "minimizing risk" rather than "restoring" the coast and "protecting" everybody and everything. Given the magnitude of the problem and the lack of time and money, limiting risk is the right approach.

Levees alone won't protect us: A couple of weeks ago, I mentioned a striking map the plan contains, one we published on Wednesday's front page. A sea of red, representing an encroaching Gulf of Mexico, consumes almost every inch of every inhabited community south of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway in Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes. And the parts that are left within 50 years would flood so often it would make them impractical to inhabit.

More specifically, I have since learned, the map reflects a future in which south Lafourche's levee system, considered by too many locals as virtually impregnable, will become progressively less protective as it tries to hold back what eventually will become the full force of the Gulf of Mexico. Residents will endure progressively more flooding as the levee gets breached and overtopped more frequently. The same will happen to the Morganza hurricane-protection levees being built in Terrebonne.

The plan calls for bolstering barrier islands, which officials contend will blunt storm surges before they hit the levees. And it would elevate, flood-proof or move thousands of homes inside the levee system, including many in Houma and places too many people mistakenly believe are immune to such flooding. Lacking time and money to restore everything, the idea is to reduce risk so we have a community to come back to after a storm hits. That might be difficult to take emotionally, but it sounds rational to me.

Others have faced the same decisions: In 2002, Isle de Jean Charles, at the southeastern tip of Terrebonne Parish, was home to 80 families, an estimated 277 residents, when the Army Corps of Engineers announced that it would be too costly to include the island within the Morganza levee system's protective walls. The corps offered to buy the homes of those who would voluntarily move to higher ground, but the deal fell apart after a chaotic public meeting that failed to yield a clear consensus on whether residents wanted to stay or go.

Now, an estimated two dozen families remain; the rest have left to escape repeated storms and flooding with no aid at all.

It's the same story in Dulac, where census data show 40 percent of residents have left over the past 10 years.

Those who faced these decisions have said for years that residents of other Terrebonne and Lafourche parish communities would soon be forced to do the same. They were right.

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January 27, 2012

The Mississippi River Delta Must Be Restored

By RANDY FERTEL

New Orleans

THE Mississippi River Delta loses the equivalent of a [football field](#) of marshland every hour as it melts into the Gulf of Mexico. Over the last 75 years, we've lost the equivalent of the state of Delaware to erosion.

We have a chance to stop this disaster and protect the delta, where much of the nation's seafood is spawned. But for this to happen, Congress must turn over billions in penalties, expected from the [BP oil spill](#), to the Gulf of Mexico states for the restoration of the delta's wetlands.

Since the 19th century, the Army Corps of Engineers has channelized the [Mississippi River](#) to improve navigation while avoiding the expense of dredging. But the [levees](#) built for that goal deprived the marsh of the alluvial silt that nurtured it over millennia. After the epic 1927 flood, the corps raised the levees higher still. Starved of silt, the marshes are now subsiding into the gulf.

On top of that, sulfur, natural gas and [oil](#) production companies have, since the 1930s, dug close to 10,000 miles of canals into the delta, gaining direct routes to their mineral wealth. These canals brought saltwater deep into the wetlands, killing marsh grasses and encouraging tidal and wave action that eroded banks. Like the pelican, our state bird that, legend has it, feeds its young with its own blood, the Mississippi River Delta has sacrificed itself for the good of the nation. But the nation has not repaid in kind.

Disaster and rebirth is an old story around here. My family has lived that cycle for generations. After the hurricane of 1915, the family spent three weeks on the levee, the only high ground, their cattle and rice, ready to harvest, washed away. Life was hard. But it was also the land of plenty. In deltaic mud 200 feet deep, they farmed rice, indigo and oranges. They hunted and fished. In the Depression, according to my mother, who would later found Ruth's Chris Steak House, "We never knew we were poor. There was always plenty of food for the taking."

What is happening to the delta today is a national crisis. Twenty percent of the seafood caught in the United States in 2009 came from the gulf. (That dropped to 16 percent in 2010, when vast

areas of the gulf were closed.) Ninety percent of that catch depends on the wetlands for some part of its life cycle.

The BP spill occurred at just the moment and at just the spot offshore where the magnificent but endangered bluefin tuna spawns. Chances are we've lost at least one generation of bluefin. (Sushi fans, think, no more toro.) Another sure sign of loss is how hard oysters are to come by. Oysters have been a mainstay in the seafood gumbo with which my Plaquemines Parish family begins our festive dinners. This December, oysters for my Christmas dressing came from a friend in Galveston, Tex.

The oil spill may prove to be one too many disasters for the return of the Plaquemines Parish my family once knew — unless we see it as an urgent opportunity for changes long overdue.

The future of all our shellfish and fisheries — shrimp, oyster, redfish, pompano, speckled trout — hinges on restoration of the delta wetlands using the billions that BP and other companies could end up owing. Since a hurricane's storm surge is reduced by the wetlands it travels across — by as much as a foot for every two and a half miles, according to some scientists — the longevity of New Orleans also relies on the wetlands' restoration. How else to get all that grain from the heartland to international markets?

President Obama recently signed legislation appropriating \$9.6 million for restoration studies in the Louisiana coastal area. But we already know how to restore the delta: by diverting the silt-laden Mississippi waters into the wetlands. Pilot river diversion programs are already building wetlands. At Wax Lake at the mouth of the Atchafalaya River, a natural diversion of the Mississippi, silt has built 25 square miles of new wetlands — which would cut a storm surge headed for inland cities and towns by many feet.

The moment is ripe. The Obama administration has called for using BP's fines for coastal restoration. The bipartisan Restore the Gulf Coast Act of 2011 was approved by a key Senate committee in September, but has not come to a vote there or in the House. If it passes, 80 percent of the Clean Water Act penalties against BP would go to the injured parties — the gulf states.

Senator Mary Landrieu, Democrat of Louisiana, rightly argues that the lion's share should be used to restore the delta wetlands, a national treasure that suffered the most harm from the BP oil spill. All that's needed now is a sense of purpose and the political will.

Randy Fertel is the author of "The Gorilla Man and the Empress of Steak: A New Orleans Family Memoir."

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:



Everything New Orleans

Take the long view on Louisiana's coastal restoration plan: An editorial

Published: Wednesday, January 25, 2012, 8:00 AM



By **Editorial page staff, The Times-Picayune**

Louisiana's **first public hearing on its proposed 50-year master plan for coastal restoration** and protection, held in New Orleans Monday, drew criticism from fishers who oppose large diversions of freshwater and sediment because they fear damage to their industry. The master plan offers speculative land-building at the cost of saltwater species, they argued.



Susan Poag, The Times-Picayune archive

In 2007, the land at right was under three feet of water. It is part of 471 acres of new marsh land created in Plaquemines and Jefferson parishes by dredging sediment from the Mississippi River.

But the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, which unveiled the \$50 billion plan earlier this month, has been clear about the priorities that guided its creation: reducing flood risk and building or maintaining new land. Louisiana is in a fight for its survival, and the state is right to focus on those two goals. Large diversion projects are a part of the plan because they are vital to building land and preserving those gains.

Fishers who attended the meeting, along with officials from St. Bernard, Plaquemines and Jefferson parishes who supported them, said that they would prefer more emphasis on dredging

sediment from the Mississippi River and offshore and pumping it to marsh-restoration sites. The master plan does include such projects: of the \$17.9 billion dedicated to marsh creation, only \$4.3 billion will be used for diversion projects.

But those seven diversion projects are essential, and the master plan makes a compelling case for including them. Pumping sediment builds land quickly, but those gains will be subject to the continuing forces of erosion.

The land-building potential of sediment diversions, by contrast, continues to grow into the future. When those projects were taken out of the picture, the plan's projected land-building was significantly decreased.

The master plan as presented, with freshwater and sediment diversions, will allow Louisiana to **gain more land** than it is losing by 2042 and to reach about 2.5 square mile of growth per year by 2061. Without those diversions, Louisiana will continue to lose land, ranging from 3.4 square miles per year to 23.7 square miles per year, according to the plan.

"These results indicate that sustainable restoration of our coast without sediment diversion is not possible," the plan concludes. That's the bottom line, and the state must focus on building land.

P.J. Hahn, director of coastal programs for Plaquemines Parish, said that the state should follow the restoration plan of that parish, which calls for a series of much smaller diversions -- an approach that advocates believe will have less of an impact on fishing.

But the state did consider that option and concluded that it was actually worse for species such as oysters than fewer, larger-scale diversions.

The simple truth is that marsh degradation itself has created more habitat for saltwater species. No one would reasonably argue that the land loss should continue unabated for that reason.

But arguing against marsh rebuilding projects that provide the biggest return on investment and the most sustainable growth is also shortsighted.

The Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority has devised an achievable and realistic master plan that focuses on the big picture. That's critical if Louisiana hopes to end decades of land loss and move toward land gain.

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Come out, learn and contribute

Published: Saturday, January 21, 2012 at 8:48 p.m.

The images tell a worrisome tale.

The sea of red splashed across south Louisiana represents the land that will be lost in the next 50 years if nothing more is done to protect our coast.

Altogether, the forecast says, the state could lose as many as 1,756 square miles of land as the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico advance farther inland.

It is the dire projection that helps to inform much of the Louisiana 2012 Coastal Master Plan, a document that lays out a detailed and interconnected list of projects aimed at protecting much of the coast and even building some land in the coming decades.

Actually, the ambitious plan hopes to protect much of the coastal land we have that would otherwise be lost to the sea. It also hopes to build significant areas of land.

More than a restoration plan for the coast, though, the master plan lays out a reasonable projection for how Louisiana can keep its coast inhabitable for decades into the future.

There are plans to restore barrier islands, construct or strengthen levees that have been built or are in the process of being built. There are also plans to introduce fresh water into our coastal areas through freshwater diversion projects from the Atchafalaya and Mississippi rivers.

And there are suggestions about how to best prepare homes and businesses to face the floods that could come even with the protective measures.

The plan suggests using state, federal and local money to help people elevate their homes. Another possibility is helping them move to higher ground rather than remaining in homes likely to flood repeatedly.

All of it is speculative. The plan is just that, a framework for future action. It has not been approved by the state Legislature or put into effect.

But it is an excellent place to start, and it is past time that our state begin the honest discussion over how we will continue to live along a coast that is increasingly vulnerable to storms, erosion and subsidence.

You and everyone else in south Louisiana has a huge stake in the outcome of the conversation, and there is much to learn and contribute.

The planners will hold a public open house and hearing from 1-7:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Houma-Terrebonne Civic Center, 346 Civic Center Blvd., Houma. The open house will run 1-5:30 p.m., and the hearing — your chance to give add and feedback — will run 5:30-7:30 p.m.

The coast is in peril. What we do in the coming years will literally determine our

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Coastal plan worthy of support

BY DON SHOOPMAN, THE DAILY IBERIAN | Posted: Thursday, January 19, 2012
2:00 pm

As always, the local angle is the preferred one for The Daily Iberian, especially when it deals with the valuable Louisiana coast line in the Teche Area.

The same can be said for at least one area state legislator, Sen. Simone Champagne, R-Jeanerette, who plans to meet with officials and property owners in Iberia and Vermilion parishes to discuss a new plan proposed by the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority. CPRA wants to tip the scales, as its executive director said in a story Monday, so that after 30 years the state is building more coast line than it's losing.

"This plan went a long way to establishing priorities and projects, and we developed models and decision tools that will help us to prioritize in a scientific, fact-based approach," Jerome Zeringue, the agency's head, said after a 172-page document was released showing 1,883 square miles have been lost in the past 80 years and 1,756 square miles are at risk in the next five decades.

That plan, which includes a levee system proposed to be built from Vermilion to Assumption Parish, thus protecting Iberia, St. Martin and St. Mary parishes, would cost \$50 billion for implementation. The price tag apparently would be worth it because the plan reduces annual coastal damage by \$5.4 billion, dropping the cost to \$18.1 billion each year.

How much the federal government would chip in is the key. Zeringue and Steven Peyronnin agree it requires federal funds, with the latter citing previous 65-35 splits in other federal-state joint ventures on projects.

"We think that would be an appropriate commitment here. I think the key to bringing in federal attention to this problem is to demonstrate that we are committed to landscape scale change," said Peyronnin, who also said he is hopeful the issue doesn't become a political football.

Zeringue said the state could tap funds from the Gulf of Mexico Security Act because it stipulates some oil and gas lease revenues go toward coastal restoration projects. That generates \$100 million to \$150 million per year.

The plan provides an "equitable distribution" along the coast of flood protection and restoration and builds on the first master plan released in 2007, Zeringue said.

“It’s very important that this master plan connect with our local plans from the local government,” Champagne said.

Public support is critical, which is where Champagne steps in. She wondered aloud if there is enough time for public input.

A public comment period ends Feb. 25. After that, CPRA will review the plan. Then it goes to the Louisiana Legislature for approval March 25.

For more information or to comment on the plan, go to www.coastalmasterplan.louisiana.gov/.

DON SHOOPMAN

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What a dilemma

By Keith Magill
Executive Editor

Published: Monday, January 16, 2012 at 10:00 a.m.

What impressed me most as I read the state's latest plan to save its coast is the map.

A sea of red, representing an encroaching Gulf of Mexico, consumes almost every inch of every inhabited community south of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway in Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes. And the parts that are left within 50 years look like they would flood so often it would make them impractical to inhabit.

Dulac? Gone.

Cocodrie. Underwater.

Dularge? History.

Montegut. A memory.

Almost all of southern and central Lafourche would be ringed by the parish's hurricane-protection levee — if it's built high enough and strong enough to hold against the Gulf of Mexico. No wetlands would remain to buffer it from waves and storm surges.

The map, though striking, is a pictorial representation of something advocates, environmentalists and almost everyone else who has paid attention has been saying for decades: If something is not done quickly — something meaningful — Louisiana's coastal communities will erode, sink or wash into the sea. And if those things don't vanquish us, a hurricane will.

I have just begun to digest the latest draft of the state's coastal master plan, released Thursday. But a couple of points with great consequence for Terrebonne and Lafourche residents become clear immediately:

It's a conceptual shift: The plan calls for little work to restore coastal wetlands in Terrebonne and Lafourche. Instead, it relies on a combination of levees, elevating homes and encouraging people to voluntarily sell their houses and move to higher ground. Piecemeal efforts in all of those areas have taken place for years. But the plan calls for more-sweeping and -substantial actions that will affect thousands of local residents profoundly. And that will include something few residents or local politicians have wanted to discuss, much less do: Start moving masses of people up or out of harm's way.

It's rationing: The plan makes it clear that the state is finally coming to grips with a brutal reality: It is impossible to restore the coast in a way that will allow every single



Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Autho

A map contained in the latest draft of Louisiana's plan to save its coast shows what would happen within 50 years if nothing but what is already under way is undertaken.

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one of us to live at ground level in the way we have grown accustomed. Cash-strapped state and federal governments lack the money and commitment to save, protect or restore the entire coast. And some scientists have suggested that vast swaths of Louisiana's wetlands are so far gone they can't be saved or rebuilt at any reasonable cost — if at all.

The latest plan is the so-called “greatest-good principle” in action. It aims to use limited money and time to do the greatest good for the greatest number of people. It means some people must sacrifice so others may be saved.

The plan sets the stage for political battles between potential haves and have-nots — battles that will be more heated than the ones that have slowed efforts to save the coast for years. It will pit the Houma-Thibodaux area against New Orleans and other parts of the state in a familiar fight for limited money and resources. And, within our own community, it will pit residents and politicians whose homes and communities will be protected against those who will be left outside levee systems or forced to elevate to extreme heights. Without amazing leadership, infighting could slow the efforts when time is running out, dooming more of the community to inundation than if agreement came quickly.

This is heavy stuff. It raises lots of emotional questions and forces us all not only to come to grips with how grave the threat of inundation has become but to take meaningful action soon. Doing nothing is a choice, one that consigns vast swaths of Terrebonne and Lafourche to the sea. This plan takes the tack that doing something will at least save some of us from that fate. It is a true dilemma, a choice between two evils. Which is better? Unless someone has a better plan, that's a decision we'll all need to make.

Courier and Daily Comet Executive Editor Keith Magill can be reached at 857-2201 or keith.magill@houmatoday.com.

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Everything New Orleans

Louisiana's updated coastal restoration plan is a map to the future: An editorial

Published: Sunday, January 15, 2012, 7:09 AM



By **Editorial page staff, The Times-Picayune**

The state's **updated plan** for **coastal restoration** lays out two vastly different pictures of the future for Louisiana - one dire, one hopeful. In the first, nothing is done to combat the complex forces that have already caused this state to lose 1,883 square miles of land since the 1930s.



Times-Picayune archive

Louisiana's updated strategy proposes \$50 billion in projects to reverse coastal erosion.

The result is an additional loss of land. The amount depends on a variety of factors but could be as much as 1,756 square miles over the next 50 years. Annual flooding losses could total as much as \$23.4 billion. In that grim scenario, a 500-year storm would cause flooding in areas that would not flood now.

But **the master plan** also envisions a brighter future for our vulnerable coast, one where \$50 billion in work, built over 50 years, creates 859 square miles of land and reduces annual flood damages by \$18 billion. Under this scenario, Louisiana will gain more land than it is losing beginning in 2042, reaching about 2.5 square

miles of growth per year by 2061. Louisiana hasn't seen a net gain in land since the 1930s.

The first alternative is clearly one that neither Louisiana nor the nation can allow to happen. The 2 million residents of South Louisiana are not the only ones whose future is imperiled without bold, large-scale action. So are fisheries, energy infrastructure, shipping routes and wildlife habitat that affect the entire country.

The state's master plan is ambitious but attainable. Far more could be achieved with more money, and the report outlines the greater gains that could be made with a \$100 billion budget. But this is a realistic plan that draws on money that the state has reason to expect that it will get, including Louisiana's portion of fines from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and an increased share of federal offshore oil revenue.

The master plan doesn't pretend that Louisiana's coast can go back to the map of the 1930s. Nor does it promise

that the coast 50 years from now will look like it does now. That's as it should be, since either would be impossible for a dynamic system, one that will still be affected by forces that lead to erosion as well as restoration.

But the state has taken into account critical factors that will continue to affect land loss, looking at both a moderate picture of what hurricane intensity, rate of subsidence and sea-level rise will bring and a less-optimistic projection.

This plan, updated from the 2007 Coastal Master Plan, identifies for the first time specific large-scale projects to create a sustainable coast. It also begins to draw an explicit map of Louisiana's expected future coastal landscape, something that has been urged by the National Research Council of the National Academies.

Both are important for Louisiana in tackling its land loss crisis.

The state took a large number of ideas and projects -- 1,500 -- and winnowed them down to 381 that were evaluated. Two primary factors were used to decide which to include in the plan: how well projects will reduce flood risk and how well they will build or maintain new land.

Those priorities are the right ones, and state officials decided that the plan should reflect a 50/50 split between the two. While state officials acknowledge that putting a greater share in land-building projects would bring more significant gains -- something that wasn't true of increasing the share assigned to flood protection -- officials were unwilling to give up the high level of risk reduction accomplished by spending half the resources on such measures.

State officials also aimed for a 50/50 balance between quick fixes that begin building land immediately but may not be as long-lasting and long-term fixes that are more sustainable.

The plan makes a strong case for the value of river diversions, an approach that has its opponents. When diversions were taken out of the picture, the plan said, land-building was significantly decreased and annual land loss continued, ranging from 3.4 square miles per year to 23.7 square miles per year.

"These results indicate that sustainable restoration of our coast without sediment diversion is not possible," the plan concludes.

The seven diversions in the plan account for only \$4.3 billion of the \$17.9 billion that will be spent on marsh creation, but they are clearly critical to building a sustainable coast.

The state also found that there was no advantage in using multiple small sediment diversions from the Mississippi River, an approach that some have suggested as less disruptive to oysters, for example.

The master plan aims to reduce flooding risk for all inhabited parts of the coast, although it's worth noting that the prescribed solution for less populated, rural areas is limited to what the plan calls "non-structural measures." That includes raising properties, flood-proofing homes and businesses and voluntary buyouts in highest-risk areas.

By contrast, the plan provides new levee protection for places like Slidell and LaPlace. In New Orleans, 100-year protection would be upgraded to 500-year protection, and a 500-year ring levee would be built around Lake Charles.

No matter where people live on Louisiana's coast, however, the plan delivers something that has been lacking: more certainty about what to expect in the future, and that's critically important for people in making decisions large and small.

Louisiana also gains something it urgently needs: a battle plan for saving its coast.

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