

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF OUR COASTLINE



Compiled by the Sierra Club — Delta Chapter

- ❖ Since the 1930's, Louisiana has lost 1,900 square miles of coastline and continues to lose land at a rate of 25 to 35 square miles per year.
- ❖ At this rate, Louisiana loses the equivalent of one football field every 38 minutes.



WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

- ❖ The Louisiana coast was created by silt that the Mississippi River deposited at its mouth and in flood zones.
- ❖ Because the Mississippi is controlled by levees that keep it on one path, all of its sediment is deposited into the Gulf, instead of spreading into and enriching the coast.
- ❖ Among other factors, dredging channels for ships, oil and gas pipelines and the Gulf Intercoastal Waterway comprises as much as 40 % of total land loss¹.

WHY IS THE COAST SO IMPORTANT?

- ❖ Louisiana's coastal marshes provide habitat for many species, a protection barrier for the ports and cities against storms and hurricanes, and a great source of recreation and seafood for us.
- ❖ Louisiana's shoreline contains 30% of all coastal marshes and experiences 90% of all coastal marsh loss in the continental United States
- ❖ More than 5 million migratory birds, which make up 70 percent of the nation's migrant birds², rest in Louisiana's coastal habitat.
- ❖ Two million Louisiana residents, about 50% of state's populace, live in coastal parishes, according to the 2000 Census.
- ❖ The coastline protects vital ports in Louisiana that carry 500 million tons of waterborne commerce, making up about 21% of all US waterborne commerce.
- ❖ The wetlands also provide the US with ¼ of its seafood supply.
- ❖ In 2001, Louisiana commercial fishing brought in \$343 million dollars, about 27% of the US fishing industry³

1 Penland, Dr. Shea. "The Mississippi River: Barrier Island Formation, Delta Building, and Coastal Land Loss." University of New Orleans.

2 "The Coastal Crisis and Louisiana's Response." *Watermarks*. September 2002, no 21.

3 Ibid.

- ❖ South Louisiana produces one fifth of the country's oil and one quarter of its natural gas⁴.
- ❖ Over 25% of all oil and gas consumed in the US passes through the Louisiana shore.
- ❖ Eco-tourism in the marshlands bring \$220 million to the state economy through activities such as hiking, bird watching, photography, and camping.

WHAT LEGISLATION EXISTS TO HELP?

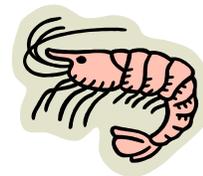
- ❖ The Breaux Act of 1990 called for "no net" loss of coastal wetlands, which would require \$14 billion.
- ❖ Coast 2050: Toward a Sustainable Louisiana, release in 1998, was the first comprehensive plan to recommend solutions for restoring coastal ecosystems.
- ❖ The Louisiana Coastal Area (LCA) study is a plan for coastal restoration, which followed the suggestions of Coast 2050 and must be approved by Congress
- ❖ The Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA) would provide \$362 million for LCA and requires the Corps of Engineers to provide a comprehensive restoration and Mississippi River modification plan to Congress by July 2008. This plan must be approved by Congress.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF NOTHING IS DONE?

- ❖ The projected amount of land loss in the next 50 years is anywhere from 500 square miles⁵, to 700 square miles⁶.
- ❖ By the year 2100 the land loss will be greater than the combined areas of Delaware and the Washington, DC- Baltimore Metro Area⁷.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

- ❖ According to the Louisiana Coastal Area study, 70% of coastal losses are man-made; therefore, human actions can also help reverse this disappearing act for the future.
- ❖ Actions YOU can take:
 - Stay informed
 - Write letters to your state and U.S. legislators.
 - Send letters-to-the-editor to your local newspaper.
 - Join the Sierra Club if you're not already a member.
 - Participate in awareness-raising events.
 - Visit the Delta Chapter Website for up-to-date information on what you can do:
<http://louisiana.sierraclub.org/>



Sources: Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, America's Wetland, Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, Louisiana Coastal Area websites, *The Scientific American*.



For more information contact the Sierra Club at 225-925-8650

4 Fishetti, Mark. "Drowning New Orleans." *The Scientific American*. Oct. 2001.
 5 Louisiana Department of Natural Resources
 6 United States Geological Survey (USGS)
 7 America's Wetland. www.americawetlands.com