

The River and Its Gift

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Abstract

South Louisiana, America's Wetland, was built into the Gulf of Mexico by the soil from 41% of the United States carried by the flood waters of the Mississippi River. The River constructed coastal wetlands which are the most productive in the United States. The dry land, slightly higher than the marshes, was also built by the River and is home to over two million people including the city of New Orleans.

This platform of South Louisiana is where the economic might of the Midwest meets the world through the waterborne traffic on the Mississippi. This platform of South Louisiana is the conduit and houses the infrastructure for over 28% of the total amount of oil and gas used by this country.

All of these benefits are at risk by a land loss problem which resulted in a 1500 square mile loss since 1930. It will lose another 1000 square miles by 2050. This future loss will wreak havoc on basic infrastructure that supports world class environmental productivity to the energy supply for the country.

There is a plan and methods to combat this loss, maintain this productive estuarine area, and reduce this nation's greatest environmental loss.

Into the Gulf of Mexico, South Louisiana was built by the force of the Mississippi River. That force took the soils from 41% of the United States and reassembled that sediment into a natural platform for 2,000,000 people to live. Plainly stated, the Mississippi River system has built a platform of ridges, swamps, marshes, estuaries, rivers and bayous which serve the nation through navigation, gas and oil supply, and fisheries production.

Due to the need for navigation and flood control, the natural cycle of building land has been changed so that wetlands, beaches and ridges are now being lost at 25 to 35 square miles a year. The continued degradation of one of the most important environmental and monetarily valuable deltas in the world should be addressed seriously on the federal level. There is no other place in the United States that has provided the function of this delta.

In the President's budget the Federal government recognizes that damage in South Louisiana was in the pursuit of national interest. And because of national interest, we suggest that the damage be mitigated.

Louisiana has 30% of the nation's coastal wetlands. Of the nation's total wetlands' loss, Louisiana is experiencing an astonishing 90% of that loss. We are also losing elevation in the range of one foot in 20 to 30 years in an area where most of the dry land is no more than 7 ft. above sea level.

These land loss factors not only threaten an important environmental area, it places 2,000,000 people at greater risk from hurricane storm surge. Major pipelines and other infrastructure for oil and gas are now exposed to more extreme hazards. This oilfield infrastructure was constructed in protected waters of coastal Louisiana. Much of

the area is transitioning into an open water marine environment. This directly affects the working condition of this infrastructure to contain the oil and to deliver it to its markets nationwide. Surface water used for industry and drinking has been contaminated on several occasions by increased salinity at the raw water intake 45 miles inland. This has made the water source unusable for thousands of people and several industrial plants during these events.

To solve these challenges from the Gulf, we must enhance our natural protection such as barrier islands and marshes, and protect our increasingly threatened communities. For our communities it is necessary to build tidal and hurricane levees, and increase the elevation of the levees in communities which already have protection.

Although we have retreated from the most threatened communities, we can justify protection for the remaining areas. These communities support people and businesses which work to provide over 28% of the nation's oil and gas, supply five (5) of the top 15 ports in the country, and produce 30% of the fisheries of the lower 48 states. To abandon these communities is to abandon over \$100 billion in public infrastructure. Studies indicate that for \$10 billion to \$15 billion, this environmentally and economically productive area, and its communities, can be maintained.

Re-introduction of Mississippi River water and sediments will allow us to maintain, and possibly regain thousands of acres of wetlands. Re-nourishment of our uninhabited barrier islands with quality offshore sand would re-establish much of the tidal protection which has been lost. It will reduce the tidal prism which has increasingly invaded marshes, 30 miles from the coast.

These projects would, in effect, keep the wetlands wet and the dry lands dry. The marriage of structural flood protection for the communities and re-establishment of the environment functions of our barrier islands and marshes is what we term Comprehensive Hurricane Protection.

A substantial portion of the levee work has been accomplished through the Congressional authorizations in 1965. However, new authorizations are necessary, along with financial support for completion of the ongoing projects.

To some degree the erosion problems of South Louisiana are attributed to international trade, and domestic onshore and offshore oil development. When one realizes that \$5 billion of royalties and lease payments go to the federal treasury only through the support of coastal Louisiana and the infrastructure it provides, it is obvious that this source of money should fund the repairs of the impacts its production causes. Louisiana has virtually no direct share of those revenues, according to agreements with the Federal government. Other states, which are impacted by oil and gas development on Federal government lands and waters, receive 50 to 90 percent share of the revenues from that development. No American argues the fairness of that sharing to the states that accept this burden. The Federal government is receiving this revenue through the support of coastal Louisiana and the fragile platform on which it sits. We ask that the Federal government reinvest the revenue necessary to protect the communities which work to produce the energy. We ask that the government reinvest the revenue necessary to protect the navigation needs on the Mississippi River. It should reinvest the revenue necessary to maintain the most biologically productive ecosystem in the lower 48 states. If the Federal government takes care of protecting its interest, Louisiana will not need

funding since protection of the Federal interest protects our unique corner of America. We do not ask for money from other states. Only reinvest in the place which is producing this revenue.

We then can continue to be the nation's waterway to the world through our ports, and be one of the nation's major gas stations especially for states like Florida, New York and California, and be the nation's seafood platter through our seafood production.

The nation has rightfully decided to defend and protect coastal systems in the United States, but none directly provides to the rest of the nation as coastal Louisiana does. If a farmer in Iowa never visits the Chesapeake or the Everglades, he may get some benefits for the federal money spent in those places. But if he never visits South Louisiana, he is still unknowingly dependent on its existence and production. The price of that farmer's fuel, fertilizer and even his fried chicken are affected by the work of South Louisiana.

That farmer's tax money is not needed to help. We ask only that the Federal government reinvest a portion of its profits to maintain the infrastructure that helped the government make that profit. Maintain South Louisiana's tremendous floodplain, not for the sake of South Louisiana, but for the nation.