



“I HOPE...”: VISIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE IN COASTAL LOUISIANA  
A PORTRAIT AND INTERVIEW SERIES FEATURING LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS IN COASTAL  
PROTECTION AND RESTORATION

Narrator: JACQUELINE RICHARD

Interviewer: LAUREN LEONPACHER

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00;00;00;07 - 00;00;26;11

**LAUREN:** My name is Lauren Leonpacher, interviewing Jacqueline Richard concerning her memories and experiences in Louisiana wetlands, as well as her hopes for a sustainable future for coastal Louisiana. This interview is being conducted near the Delta Management Project at Fort Saint Philip in Buras, Louisiana, on the afternoon of October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Do you understand that portions of the taped interview and pictures taken during the interview will be used in publications and a variety of media?

00;00;26;13 - 00;00;29;12

**JACQUELINE:** Yes.

**LAUREN:** Please state your full name and spell it for us.

00;00;29;26 - 00;00;38;07

**JACQUELINE:** Jacqueline Mary Richard J-A-C-Q-U-E-L-I-N-E M-A-R-Y R-I-C-H-A-R-D

00;00;39;01 - 00;00;42;18

**LAUREN:** Thank you. If you'd like, you can tell us your birth date and where you were born.

00;00;42;26 - 00;00;47;15

**JACQUELINE:** Sure, my birth date is August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1980. I was born in Naperville, Illinois.

00;00;48;18 - 00;00;56;19

**LAUREN:** We're interviewing you today because you have been a huge advocate for coastal restoration in Louisiana. Uh, can you tell us a little bit about how you got involved in this work?

00;00;56;23 - 00;01;26;02

**JACQUELINE:** Absolutely. So, I came to the University of New Orleans as a grad student. Umm...I actually came to be a vertebrate paleontologist when I grew up. Did not know that I was going to get sidetracked into coastal restoration, but I am very glad that I did. When I was a graduate student, I took a class on coastal restoration with, um, with Denise Reed, and in taking that class, I became pretty inspired to see if I could make a difference, um, in helping volunteer and learn about the coast.

00;01;26;15 - 00;01;40;24

**JACQUELINE:** And that's when I kind of drove off the deep end. And I still do dinosaur work. I still do research on that end, but I am more often found out in the field or helping students or teaching Master Naturalists than digging up dinosaurs these days.

00;01;41;19 - 00;01;47;19

**LAUREN:** Can you tell us a little bit more about the work that you do on a daily basis and how it relates to Louisiana wetlands?

00;01;47;25 - 00;02;16;28

**JACQUELINE:** Absolutely. So my official title is I'm the Interim Dean of STEM at Fletcher Technical Community College, but I'm also an associate professor of geology. So, in my role, um, I use it to educate the students, primarily that come through the college, on the wetlands, on coastal restoration, basic geology that they can use to identify problems, maybe in habitats that they live in, to try to figure out different pathways to move forward.

00;02;17;10 - 00;02;28;01

**JACQUELINE:** But I also use my role to work with different groups in Louisiana. I teach the Master Naturalists quite a bit as well. So I try to stay heavily involved in community outreach.

00;02;30;25 - 00;02;44;16

**LAUREN:** With regard to community outreach, and it sounds like maybe a diverse group of people that you work with, can you explain some of the ways that you work to ensure that underrepresented members of our community have their voices heard with respect to Louisiana's wetlands?

00;02;44;20 - 00;03;11;08

**JACQUELINE:** Absolutely. So one thing that we do at Fletcher Technical Community College is we have the local Houma tribe that's there. So we do offer lots of classes very specifically for the native tribe, but we do a lot of outreach there as well, and try to continue to do outreach to get them to get that local tribe into our classroom to teach us about what they do, to teach their local native methodologies.

00;03;11;19 - 00;03;27;19

**JACQUELINE:** So it's kind of more like a community sharing of information, because things that they know generationally might be things I know from a textbook, but the way that they put it makes a little bit more sense. And, you know, we can kind of put some science to maybe some of the things that they're observing and vice versa.

00;03;28;13 - 00;03;34;03

**JACQUELINE:** Um, so that kind of community outreach is really great, um working with the native tribes.

00;03;35;10 - 00;03;40;02

**LAUREN:** Do you have a favorite memory of living or working in coastal Louisiana?

00;03;40;28 - 00;04;09;06

**JACQUELINE:** Absolutely. So probably one of my favorite memories is one of my very first from when I moved down here. Um, so... In being a paleontologist, you have to dissect lots and lots of animals, and my first visit to the swamp was to go catch alligators for dissection. And it was really an interesting venture. I had never really been into the swamp, never really seen alligators alive outside of a zoo before,

00;04;10;07 - 00;04;32;27

**JACQUELINE:** let alone the ritual that I was told had to be performed to get into this program. They had three eight-foot long alligators that were in an area... in an enclosed area that I had to go in and jump on their backs and tape their mouths. And so that was a really fun thing to do. There was a lot of supervision, but basically I was told to go do it.

00;04;32;27 - 00;04;48;26

**JACQUELINE:** And that was a really fun phone call to make back home, you know? "Hey Mom, guess what I just did!" And I really think that kind of spurred on my passion to learn a little bit more about people that do this for fun. So many people do this for fun! So I wanted to learn a little bit more about it.

00;04;49;13 - 00;05;09;21

**LAUREN:** You have a... it sounds like a lot of personal endeavors or activities that you do outside of your career that, you know, work to restore our coast or help educate people. Can you talk to us about your personal relationship with Louisiana wetlands as well?

00;05;09;25 - 00;05;27;21

**JACQUELINE:** Absolutely. So one of my favorite things to do is to kayak through the wetlands. It's my favorite thing to do because it puts me right at eye level with a lot of the species and really kind of puts you in the grass. You know, a lot of people want to see above it, see what's going on. But it's a different world when you're looking into it.

00;05;28;17 - 00;05;52;08

**JACQUELINE:** And so... It's one of my favorite things to go out on my kayak for eight, ten, twelve hours sometimes and, you know, kind of get lost, find my way out. I commonly like to chit chat with the birds while I'm kayaking along. But it just you learn so much being immersed in it. My favorite part about being on the kayak is probably after about thirty or forty-five minutes of paddling around, I don't even notice the kayak anymore.

00;05;52;20 - 00;05;56;13

**JACQUELINE:** It's just like I'm part of the system, and it's just a really beautiful feeling.

00;05;57;27 - 00;06;14;00

**LAUREN:** Is there a time that you were out on the water or out cleaning up or planting or teaching that you had a moment that you really felt hopeful for our future, for Louisiana's future?

00;06;14;16 - 00;06;37;14

**JACQUELINE:** Absolutely. Um, I really think that there's been a couple of times, but most recently I've been doing a lot of work out at Elmer's Island, doing beach sweeps with BTNEP up and I've always tried to get students to come out. And, you know, students are always like, "Oh...well how much extra credit am I going to get?" But here in the last year or two, I've had a lot of students that don't even care about that.

00;06;37;14 - 00;07;02;18

**JACQUELINE:** They just they want to serve their community. They want to better their environment. They want to better the place they live in. And I've seen an influx or have had an influx of students that just want to follow me wherever I go and help with doing whatever I'm doing. And that makes me really hopeful for generations to come that people are going to see this land not as a place to profit from, you know, money-wise, but as a place to profit from for the ecosystem, for our soul, right?

00;07;02;18 - 00;07;06;20

**JACQUELINE:** For the whole the entire ecosystem basically.

00;07;09;02 - 00;07;24;23

**LAUREN:** Considering that, I mean, you talked a little bit about why coastal restoration is important for... for us in Louisiana, but can you explain why you think that it's important for the nation or the world to care about Louisiana and preserving this ecosystem?

00;07;24;26 - 00;07;49;07

**JACQUELINE:** Yeah, I think there's definitely different aspects of that. You know, obviously economically, it's really important. This is a very important port. You know, a lot of the goods and services come through the Mississippi River. You know, we have to have the wetlands here to protect that. So financially, it's really important. But I think, you know, the culture down here is also really important to preserve.

00;07;49;21 - 00;08;16;23

**JACQUELINE:** You know, I've been to all but three states in the country, and there's no place like here, no place that has their own cultural identity, the way that Louisiana does. And it's just something that needs to be preserved and needs to be protected. And it's not just the people but it's the animals that live here as well. I mean, you know, you come out to this place and, you know, you may see a bird or two here that you're not going to see anywhere else.

00;08;17;02 - 00;08;20;22

**JACQUELINE:** You know? And all of that identity really needs to be saved.

00;08;22;07 - 00;08;33;21

**LAUREN:** Jacqueline, thank you so much for talking with us. Is there anything else that you would like us to know or anything that you'd like the future generations of Louisiana or of our nation to know about coastal Louisiana and our wetlands?

00;08;22;07 - 00;08;33;21

**JACQUELINE:** Just that, you know, we can all do our part to help protect it, whether it's big or small, you know? Whether it's just cleaning out your storm drain, you know, to help um things not get flooded or whether it's getting involved in a coastal planting or writing a CWPPRA grant. There's a lot of things that people can do to get involved.

00;08;52;09 - 00;08;58;18

**JACQUELINE:** And I really think that whatever step everybody takes, if we all take a step, it's going to help in the long run.