

LA Wetland Education Coalition

Wetland News for December 17, 2004



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1. **Habitat Connections**

The Fisheries Office of Habitat Conservation has re-launched their quarterly newsletter, *Habitat Connections*. The next three issues will focus on oyster habitat around the nation. To subscribe, contact Laura.Walko@noaa.gov

2. **Math and Science Song Information, Viewable Everywhere**

Math And Science Song Information, Viewable Everywhere (MASSIVE), is a database containing information on more than 1700 science and math songs. The songs, suitable for a variety of ages and of varying sound quality, are both silly and serious. Visitors can search on a song or listen to MASSIVE radio, "an Internet radio station devoted entirely to science/math songs." For more information, check out <http://www.science-groove.org/MASSIVE/>.

3. **Breaux Act to provide coastal restoration funding into 2019**

Washington, D.C. - President George W. Bush signed the omnibus spending bill that included an extension of the Breaux Act until September 30, 2019 into law today. The extension was included in the omnibus spending bill, known as the "Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2005," that was approved by the House in a unanimous vote on December 7.

The original program, formally known as the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (Title III of Pubic Law 101-646) or CWPPRA, was signed into law by former President George Bush on November 29, 1990 and was authorized for 10 years. It was later reauthorized for an additional 10 years to run until September 30, 2009. U.S. Senator John Breaux, patriarch of the program, spearheaded the effort for this

current extension into 2019 prior to his retirement which will take place this coming January.

The Breaux Act (CWPPRA) makes funds available to restore and protect wetlands through three programs: Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Restoration Projects, National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Projects, and North American Wetlands Conservation Program. Besides the extension until 2019, the new law provides for the removal of the limit or spending cap on how much funding may be spent of the funding received by each of the Breaux Act's three programs. The new legislation does not affect the statutory limit on the total amount of funds that the Breaux Act may receive from the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund/Sport Fish Restoration Account (ARTF/SPRA). The Breaux Act receives 18 percent from the ARTF/SPRA.

The Breaux Act provides approximately \$50 million a year for coastal protection and restoration in Louisiana. The Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force (Breaux Act Task Force) oversees the implementation of the Breaux Act in Louisiana. The Task Force is composed of the State of Louisiana and five federal agencies, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, NOAA-National Marine Fisheries Service, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This unique partnership has led to the completion of 63 projects that will benefit approximately 50,000 acres throughout Louisiana's coastal zone. The program has another 69 projects either in the engineering and design or construction phases.

"The Breaux Act has a solid track record for executing effective coastal restoration projects in Louisiana," said Colonel Peter Rowan, New Orleans District Engineer and Chair of the Breaux Act Task Force. "Through this program we have begun the long process of reversing the loss of land, marsh and critical habitat. With extension of the act, the Task Force has the opportunity to continue the program well into the future."

During the 20th century, coastal Louisiana lost 1.2 million acres (1,900 sq. mi.) of land, and if nothing is done, could potentially lose another 430,000 acres (670 sq. mi.) in the next 50 years. The acreage lost and projected to be lost over this 100 plus year period is greater than the size of Delaware and Washington, DC-Baltimore, MD metropolitan area combined.

For more information about America's vanishing wetland and efforts to protect and restore it, visit <http://www.LaCoast.gov> or contact Gabrielle Boudreaux Bodin at 337.266.8623 or Gabrielle_Bodin@usgs.gov.

4. Money Spied Off a Vanishing Coastline

By Scott Gold, Times Staff Writer, LA TIMES, December 13, 2004

BATON ROUGE, La. — Desperate to fund programs that could rescue the disappearing Louisiana coast, Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco will attempt to force the federal government to share the money it gets from energy companies that drill in the Gulf of Mexico. Energy companies pay more than \$5 billion annually to the U.S. government for the right to mine the gulf for oil and natural gas. Louisiana's campaign, if successful, would be likely to send more than half a billion dollars each year to gulf states, which include some of the poorest in the nation. Louisiana has tried repeatedly to win a share of lease payments and royalties. This time the stakes are higher.

If Blanco's proposal falls on deaf ears in Washington — she hopes to discuss it with President Bush in February — her aides say the state is prepared to begin rejecting new requests for drilling licenses. Blanco, a Democrat who took office in January, has urged other oil- and gas-producing states to join forces on the issue. It is a hardball tactic that would land with a thud in the energy industry at a time when Bush is pushing to reduce the nation's dependence on foreign sources of oil by increasing domestic production. Louisiana is critical to that effort; a third of the oil and natural gas consumed in the U.S. comes ashore here.

Phil Flynn, an energy analyst at Alaron Trading Corp. in Chicago, said the gulf was an important source of fuel, particularly natural gas. If Louisiana makes good on its threat, Flynn said, it could curtail domestic production — increasing prices and, potentially, driving businesses overseas, where gas would be cheaper and more abundant. "These people could hold the nation hostage," Flynn said. "Basically, I think it would be a very wise thing to give them their way."

The White House Council on Environmental Quality and the Energy Department referred calls to the Minerals Management Service, which oversees offshore oil and gas production. Gary Strasburg, a service spokesman, said he would not "speculate about anything that might happen in the future."

Blanco's proposal calls for the four states that line the central gulf — Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama — to earn a greater share of royalties and lease

payments. Blanco recently sent letters to the governors of those states, but they have not decided whether to join her campaign. She has also asked Alaska, which could make money based on a similar profit-sharing measure there, to join in the effort. Interior states receive about half of the money that energy companies pay to drill on their land. The payments are intended to compensate those states for the damage that drilling can cause. Waterfront states historically have been paid only a tiny slice of the money generated by offshore drilling.

In an interview, Blanco said she had no plans to demand that waterfront states receive the same portion given to interior states. But she said Louisiana and its neighbors on the gulf were entitled to 10% of the money that energy companies paid. Louisiana officials want to use the money for repairs to the state's fragile shoreline. The equivalent of a football field's worth of marshland is lost to open water every 38 minutes here, according to the state Department of Natural Resources, and scientists say another 500 square miles will be lost in the next 50 years if nothing is done.

Industries are threatened by the land loss. More than a billion pounds of seafood are caught here each year, for instance, but fisheries are evaporating as erosion destroys the balance of saltwater and freshwater. In many places, the state's natural protection from storms has also vanished. Scientists who are studying the problem — some affiliated with the state, others with local universities and industries — point to a host of potential causes. For decades, the state allowed ranchers, industries and others to dig navigation canals through marshy areas, only to realize in recent years that lasting damage had been done. Global warming, most scientists agree, is causing sea levels to rise, which also has contributed to the problem.

Much of the damage, however, can be tied directly to the energy industry. Scores of canals have been dug to make room for pipelines. Others, some of them 100 feet wide, were built to accommodate barges needed to steer drilling platforms into open water. Because of the loss of marshes, numerous pipelines that were once protected by silt and vegetation — and were not built for open-water conditions — are now exposed, resting like spaghetti on the seabed in shallow water.

When Hurricane Ivan swept across the Gulf of Mexico in September, energy companies reported more than 30 spills amid the maze of pipelines, said James R. Hanchey, deputy secretary of the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources. Ivan blew one piece of pipe several miles across the gulf, and a drilling platform was found 70 miles from where it was when the storm hit.

The infrastructure that is used to move oil and gas to shore is also threatened by the loss of land. For example, Port Fourchon, an important energy hub on the gulf that houses 150 companies, is connected to the mainland by one road — a 17-mile stretch of Louisiana Highway 1. Pieces of the road are frequently washed out by storms, and scientists say a significant stretch will be underwater permanently within eight years.

Louisiana officials say \$14 billion or more will be needed over the next 30 years to stem the loss of land on the coast. So far, the White House has promised \$1.9 billion over 10 years. "We have accepted the role of providing oil and gas energy to the nation. It is our historic responsibility," Blanco said. "But this is years and years of public policy gone awry.... We are asking the federal government to take a look at the burden we bear."

The federal government is the primary regulator of oil and gas operations in the gulf, particularly beyond the three-mile boundary of Louisiana state waters. However, state officials said that even for deep-water drilling, the state must issue what is known as a "consistency declaration" before a new lease is granted. The declaration essentially means that the state agrees that a new lease is "consistent" with Louisiana's environmental and economic needs. For several years, the state has laid the groundwork for Blanco's campaign by reminding energy companies that the state suffers damage every time a new lease is granted. "We have stopped just short of saying that we are not going to accept the lease," said Sidney Coffee, Blanco's executive assistant for coastal activities. "That option is available to us."

If Louisiana began to deny leases, a move that state officials consider a last resort, it would be likely to spark heated debate about whether the federal government could overrule the decision. Strasburg, the Minerals Management spokesman, said that Interior Secretary Gale A. Norton had the right to balance "national interest and the well-being of the citizens of the state."

Blanco also said Louisiana might consider suing the federal government for a greater share of the money. "I would hate for it to come to that," Blanco said. "But if push comes to shove, we could be forced to do it. There is a clear inequity and a clear need."

5. Blanco, delegation pledge cooperation; Congressional team vows to put state before party

By Laura Maggi, Times-Picayune, Capital bureau, Wednesday, December 15, 2004
BATON ROUGE -- After meeting with Gov. Kathleen Blanco on Tuesday, Republican and Democratic members of the Louisiana congressional delegation pledged to work together to get federal money for restoring the coast, building highways and improving schools. All present said the harsh rhetoric and partisanship of the recent election season have been put aside in favor of a cooperative spirit. Blanco, a Democrat, appeared to embrace the heavily Republican slant of the new delegation, saying the political connection to President Bush could prove helpful.

Republican lawmakers should be able to take some of their concerns directly to the president, Blanco said after the meeting, which included members of her Cabinet and other top staff members. "With a strong voice, we should see some significant things happening," she said. Every member of the delegation that will be representing the

state next year was present, with the exception of U.S. Rep. Jim McCrery, R-Shreveport. Democratic Sen. Mary Landrieu and Republican Sen.-elect David Vitter were both in attendance, as was Blanco's opponent in the gubernatorial runoff last year, Rep.-elect Bobby Jindal, R-Kenner. Rep. Richard Baker, R-Baton Rouge, and Rep. William Jefferson, D-New Orleans, were also present, as was the recent GOP convert Rep. Rodney Alexander of Quitman. Although Blanco campaigned for state Sen. Willie Mount, D-Lake Charles, in the 7th Congressional District, she played host Tuesday to Rep.-elect Charles Boustany, R-Lafayette, who won the seat in the Dec. 4 runoff. Rep.-elect Charlie Melancon, D-Napoleonville, also attended. Speaking with reporters after the meeting, Vitter said he embraces the nonpartisan cooperation. "I don't know anybody outside of Washington, D.C., who defines themselves primarily as Democrats or Republicans," he said.

The big issues on the table included the continued battle to bring in money to save Louisiana's coast and getting enough federal highway money to extend Interstate 49, which currently runs from Lafayette to Shreveport. Landrieu said the key to coming up with money to rebuild the coast is for Congress to approve her legislation that would channel hundreds of millions of dollars annually to Louisiana from royalty payments from off-shore oil drilling. Vitter agreed the state needs a steady stream of money to pay for coastal restoration, saying that as a Republican he should have an edge in fighting for the financing.

But Blanco wasn't entirely nonpartisan. She called on the delegation to support "middle-class tax relief," reflecting many Democrats' argument during the recent election that the benefits of Bush's tax cuts have been felt mostly by those in the top income brackets. She also asked the congressional delegation to support a pay raise for the lowest-paid workers. "We need a higher national minimum wage," Blanco said. Republicans typically have been opposed to mandated increases in the minimum wage, which is set at \$5.15 per hour, saying it would force employers to lay off workers. Vitter said he agreed with that concern; he also said an increased minimum wage could be particularly detrimental in the hospitality industry.

To help coordinate the governor's efforts with the congressional delegation, Blanco announced that she has hired a full-time lobbyist for the state. Blanco said Stephanie Leger will be her director of state/federal relations and head up the state's office in Washington. A Lafayette native, Leger worked for six years for retiring U.S. Sen. John Breaux, D-La. Leger, who currently works for DCI Group, a public affairs firm in Washington, will begin her new job next month.

6. Elmer's Island would be a nice present (Editorial)

By JOE MACALUSO, Baton Rouge Advocate outdoors writer, December 12, 2004.

We're a couple of weeks away from those year-ender reports, stories that reporters and readers use to summarize what's happened this year. It's not too early to tackle one for loyal Advocate Outdoors readers, not when it comes to Elmer's Island.

In this time when giving is better than receiving -- and as long as the state is willing to make financial inducements and concessions to tank-car makers and a bad football team -- isn't it time to give the people of the Sportsman's Paradise something for their money? If Gov. Kathleen Blanco wants to give us a present, then give us Elmer's Island.

Look, I didn't grow up fishing from a boat. I learned from the banks and the seashore, from the seawall on Lake Pontchartrain, from the banks of Lake St. Catherine, from piers and the surf along Grand Isle, The Fourchon and Elmer's Island. So, this is a plea from someone who knows how much Elmer's Island means when it comes to enjoying fishing in the purest form Louisiana can offer a hungry, young fisherman.

What's more Gov. Blanco, there are thousands of "someones" in our state whose stories about camping, crabbing, fishing and beachcombing at and on Elmer's Island is becoming a far too-distant memory. Every time Elmer's Island is mentioned, one or another state official says in so many words that "things" are coming together. Well, "things" or "coming together" must mean something completely different to them than it does to you and me.

Elmer's Island is for sale: Elmer's Island makes up a big part of the beach-accessible areas Louisianians have in our state. I guess I'm making a mistake asking that Elmer's Island be made a present to us. In fact, the sportsmen of our state have paid for this 1,400-acre tract many times over with taxes that go into the general fund and into the Department of Transportation and Development.

To wit:

- Hunters and fishermen pay road-use fuel taxes for gasoline they use in their boats. Maybe what we need is a couple of hundred hunters and fishermen keeping track of the fuel used in boats and ATVs. Then state officials would understand just how much tax money goes to DOTD for state roads when the vehicle using the fuel isn't using a road. (We'd probably feel a little better if all the roads to our favorite fishing holes were in good shape).
- Mentioning ATVs, we pay a \$24 four-year state license to use our ATVs, \$12 of which goes to DOTD. By law, ATVs are not allowed to be driven on roadways. Where does that \$12 go for us? The absurdity of that is not to be believed. The other \$12 goes to Wildlife and Fisheries.
- There is no sales-tax exemption on goods and services purchased/provided to hunters and fishers,

so we have to believe our purchases hand over to the state lots of extra revenue.

- With few exceptions, the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries operates on self-generated funds, lots of it from hunting and fishing licenses, so our taxes don't go to the agency that administrates what lots of us like to do.

So, begging is absurd.

Now, all you well-meaning state officials, it's time to step up and sign on the dotted line. Give the Elmer family a reasonable price for their "island," and give tens of thousands of folks the chance to enjoy this prime piece of the Sportsman's Paradise.

To read the editorial online, go to

http://www.2theadvocate.com/stories/121204/out_outwild001.shtml

7. Swamped: LA Students Become Wetland Custodians

"Christian is shivering with a combination of cold and excitement. It's a stormy April day, and the wind and rain haven't let up for hours. Although the weather has forced the cancellation of a class field trip, Christian is upbeat. The reason for his good mood? It's in the bucket he carries -- a slimy, wriggling creature the seventh grader has brought in to share with his classmates.

Barry Guillot, Christian's science teacher at Harry M. Hurst Middle School, in Destrehan, Louisiana, is as enthusiastic as his young student. "Oh, man," he says as he carries the bucket to the center of the room and beckons to the rest of the class. "Guys, come and take a look at this." The story continues at <http://glef.org>

Barry Guillot and his Wetland Watchers are honored at the George Lucas Education Foundation Web site. Visit the Web to learn more about service learning and environmental education related to wetlands.

8. LA Governor's Environmental Education Commission to Sponsor Art Contest; Theme for 2005 contest will be Louisiana Wetlands!

Each year the Louisiana Governor's Environmental Education Commission sponsors an Art and Language Contest for K-12 Louisiana students. This year's theme was Forest Trees of Louisiana. The winners (1st, 2nd, and 3rd and overall winner) in each category drawing or language piece are included in this calendar. There were over 200 entries to judge this year from nearly 20 Louisiana schools. ALCOA has generously provided a grant to the Commission that covers the cost of the awards to the winners and the printing of the calendars. The art winners' drawings are converted into billboards that were featured around Louisiana for 4 months this past summer, and the language pieces are published in

the Baton Rouge Advocate in mid-summer. Last year's calendar was focused on Louisiana Waters. This year's theme is Louisiana Wetlands. **All entries will be due in March.** The advertisement of the contest has not come out yet, but will in January. Please encourage your children, their teachers, and schools to participate. If you would like a copy of the calendar, contact Tiffany Soileau, LA Office of Environmental Education, P.O. Box 82980, Baton Rouge, LA 70884-2980, or call 877-523-6833. Ms. Soileau's email is tiffany.soileau@la.gov.

The Louisiana Environmental Education Commission is funded by the Environmental Education License Plate. If you have the inclination you may request an EE License Plate the next time you renew. The additional \$25 you pay goes to the Commission. The Commission funds the Art & Language Contest, Environmental Education Teacher Grants, the ENVIROTHON, and the Louisiana Environmental Education Symposium. The Symposium is being held this **February 11 – 12, 2005**, at the Holidome in Lafayette. For additional information on any of these efforts, visit <http://www.gov.state.la.us/enved/>.



9. LAWEC-L LISTSERVE INFORMATION

- **Description of this listserv:** A listserv serving educators interested in LA wetlands.
- **To send a message of your own to the listserv:** email LAWEC-L@LISTSERV.LSU.EDU and type your message into the body of the email. The message will be distributed to ALL PARTICIPANTS subscribing to the listserv. As a participant, you are welcome to send messages to educators subscribing to the LA Wetland Education Consortium listserv. We ask that participants focus their emails on educational opportunities and materials *directly related to wetland education*.
- **To UNSUBSCRIBE from this listserv:** email LAWEC-L@LISTSERV.LSU.EDU and enclose the following single line in the body of the email
unsubscribe LAWEC-L
- **To SUBSCRIBE to this listserv:** email LISTSERV@LISTSERV.LSU.EDU, with only the following line listed in the body of the email:
subscribe lawec-l YourFirstName YourLastName

For example:

subscribe lawec-l John Doe

NOTE: You should not put anything in the subject line and should remove any automatic signatures from the email, otherwise the signup process will not work. You will get a return message indicating that you have been subscribed to the listserv along with information on other listserv operations you can perform (such as unsubscribe, etc.). If you have trouble, email Dr. Pam Blanchard at pamb@lsu.edu.

Please do not reply to the entire list unless you want everyone to read your message!

