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Louisiana Wetlands News

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Coastal Restoration Educational Meetings Set for Commercial and Recreational Fishermen - February 1995

During February 1995, the LSU Agricultural Center's Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, Louisiana Sea Grant College Program, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources will cosponsor 10 coastal restoration educational meetings for the general public, specifically targeting commercial and recreational fishermen. These meetings are conducted to:

1) Review and document public perception of current and proposed coastal restoration approaches,

2) outline information voids that may be contributing to documented concerns and

3) evaluate potential educational approaches and actions that may be implemented to address identified concerns.

There seems to be a lot of misunderstanding about coastal restoration project goals and timelines. Many people do not make the direct connection between specific restoration projects and the coastal resources being enhanced. At these meetings the strong linkage between coastal vegetated wetlands and fisheries production will be explained. Additionally, the concept of short-term sacrifices potentially associated with long-term (sustainable) fisheries production will be reviewed. We hope these meetings will help clarify many of these concepts.

All meetings will be recorded, and summaries will be included in the overall meeting report. Meeting dates and locations include:

Date	Place	Location
2/1	Cameron	Cameron Parish Police Jury Annex
2/2	Baton Rouge	LDWF Building
2/7	Bayou Vista	B.V. Community Center
2/9	Delcambre	Shrimp Festival Building
2/13	Houma	Houma Municipal Auditorium
2/16	Lafitte	Lafitte Civic Center

Date	Place	Location
2/20	Cutoff	Cutoff Youth Center
2/21	Port Sulphur	P.S. Civic Center
2/22	Slidell	Slidell Auditorium
2/23	Chalmette	S.B. Parish Gov't Bldg.

All meetings will start at 7:00 p.m. and last approximately 2 to 2.5 hours. Agenda topics will include:

- Why restoration (history of coastal land loss and causes)
- Where are we now regarding coastal restoration (activities to date and outlook for the next five years)
- Restoration associated fishing impacts - positive and negative
- Public comments/questions
- Meeting summary (how to become involved, where to get more information, key contacts)

For more information, contact my office in Baton Rouge.

Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) 4th Priority Project List

In 1989, when the State Coastal Restoration Trust Fund was first established, annual state oil and gas severance taxes collected exceeded $650 million. The approved constitutional amendment allows for the first $5 million collected from oil and gas severance taxes to go directly into the state restoration Fund, another $10 million goes into the Fund when severance tax collections reach a $600 million threshold, and an additional $10 million goes into the Fund when $650 million is collected. There is, therefore, a potential for the Trust Fund to accumulate $25 million per year.

With the drastic drop in oil and gas production in Louisiana, however, state severance taxes are not reaching the $600 million threshold. This has essentially restricted state restoration funding to only $5 million per year. With reduced funding available to meet the required 25% CWPPRA match, the state is now unable to fully utilize the available federal restoration funding.

Because of a lack of available state match, only the first six 4th priority restoration projects have been funded this year. These projects include (in order of priority):

1) Eden Isles East Marsh Restoration
2) Bayou L'Ours Ridge Hydrologic Restoration
3) Grand Bay Crevasse
4) East Timballer Barrier Island Restoration
5) Perry Ridge Bank Protection
6) Barataria Bay Waterway Bank Protection

The CWPPRA Task Force, however, will give local parishes approximately one year to come up with local matching funds for unfunded projects that were approved by the CWPPRA Technical Committee. These include 1) Marsh Island Marsh Creation and Hydrologic Restoration, 2) Naomi Outfall Management, 3) Pass a Loutre Sediment Mining, 4) Black Bayou Culverts, 5) Grand Bayou/ GIWW Freshwater Introduction, and 6) Little Vermilion Bay Sediment Trapping. If a local match cannot be obtained within a year, the unfunded priority project list will be abolished and all old and new project proposals will be considered equally for the 5th priority list.

Additionally, the new assistant secretary of the Department of Natural Resources, Dr. Ivor Van Heerdon, would like the state to shift its emphasis from small-scale restoration projects to more large-scale, "big-picture" restoration initiatives that will involve both freshwater/sediment diversions and barrier island restoration.

The 4th Priority List must be presented to the Louisiana Legislature for final approval. This has normally been a formality, but I assume some discussion will take place about the proposed shift from an emphasis on small restoration projects to more "big-picture" approaches.

Federal CWPPRA funding comes up for reauthorization in 1995. To assure continued Congressional support, it will be very important that Louisiana document and present CWPPRA project successes. Most members of Louisiana's Congressional Delegation have pledged their support for CWPPRA reauthorization.

I will continue to update you about coastal restoration policy as it unfolds. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call.

State Releases New Position On Maintenance of Federal Navigation Channels

In late December 1994, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) proposed a new policy that would essentially eliminate the use of state coastal restoration trust fund money to maintain the banks of federal navigation channels. DNR feels that the entire cost of channel bank stabilization should be shouldered by the federal government.

Because of the continued decline in state oil and gas related severance taxes, restoration funding has dropped significantly. DNR is concerned that continued sponsorship of channel bank stabilization projects could essentially use up the entire restoration Trust Fund each year. Officials of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, however, maintain that a 25% state or local contribution is required for all bank stabilization projects.

Maintenance of channel banks is extremely important to Louisiana wetlands because of the potential exposure of intermediate and freshwater marshes to full strength seawater if banks erode.

Updates concerning this new channel bank policy will be included in future newsletters.

EPA and NOAA Reverse Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program Positions

In a letter to the Coastal States Organization dated January 6, 1995, EPA and NOAA outlined several position reversals regarding the manner in which State Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Programs (CNPCP) will be approved.

Timeframe

- EPA and NOAA will grant "conditional" approval of State programs for up to five years. During this time, the penalty provisions (partial loss of Coastal Zone Management and Section 319 CWA funding) would not apply. Conditional approval would include benchmarks for progress towards full program development and approval.

- States that receive full program approval will be awarded additional funds from the 25% set-aside of appropriated Section 6217 funds.

- Implementation activities would become eligible for Section 319 CWA funding under either full or conditional program funding.

- The timeframe for implementing management measures for existing nonpoint sources would be extended from three years to five years, beginning at the time of either full or conditional program approval. New nonpoint sources would continue to implement management measures as they come on line.

Geographic Scope of the Program

- The obligation of States, NOAA, and EPA under Section 6217 is to establish coastal nonpoint source programs which restore and protect coastal waters generally. For program approval, the law requires that NOAA and EPA determine if the state's Section 6217 boundary is adequate to meet this goal. Even though NOAA and EPA feel that states should utilize coastal watersheds to establish the geographic scope of their programs, they recognize the limitations of the data that were used in making boundary recommendations and expect that States will have more specific information to better delineate the 6217 management area. NOAA and EPA will accept a less extensive State 6217 management area unless it can be determined that the proposed area excludes: (a) existing land or water uses that reasonably can be expected to have significant impact on coastal waters of the State, or (b) reasonably foreseeable threats to coastal waters from nearby activities landward of the State's management area.

- Where information on impacts or threats to coastal waters is incomplete or inconclusive, EPA and NOAA will retain the option of conditionally approving State proposals until remaining questions can be worked out cooperatively.

Targeting

EPA and NOAA believe the coastal nonpoint programs are already targeted to coastal waters. States would be afforded flexibility for targeting nonpoint source pollution control programs in three ways:

- States may exclude categories, subcategories, and individual nonpoint sources from their programs where the sources do not, individually or cumulatively, present significant adverse effects. This exclusion is in addition to the obvious case where no sources exist.

- NOAA and EPA will defer to State delineations of the geographic scope (boundaries) of their State coastal nonpoint programs.

- States will have greater flexibility for phasing in necessary nonpoint source controls within the extended timeframes for program implementation described above. State schedules should ensure that nonpoint sources having the most significant impact on coastal waters are addressed first.

Enforceable Policies and Mechanisms

- EPA and NOAA recognize that voluntary approaches, including economic incentives, disincentives or other innovative approaches, may be used by States to implement management measures, so long as they are backed by appropriate authorities as described below.

- EPA and NOAA have expanded their view of what constitutes acceptable "back-up" enforcement authorities to include "bad-actor" laws, enforceable water quality standards, general environmental laws and prohibitions, and other existing authorities the States might point out that will accomplish the implementation management measures without requiring new, more specific authorities. In these cases, EPA and NOAA will conditionally approve State programs for up to five years, including an evaluation of progress after three years. This conditional approval will give all parties the opportunity to make sure that this approach is successfully achieving widespread implementation to ensure protection of coastal waters.

The Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has scheduled an informal Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program (CNPCP) threshold review with both federal oversight agencies (EPA and NOAA) on February 21-23, 1995. All aspects of the state program will be discussed according to the guidelines outlined above. Final plan submittal is scheduled for July 1, 1995. For more information about Louisiana's CNPCP or the scheduled Threshold Review, call my office in Baton Rouge.

Tentatively Accepted Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) Acres Covering 1994 Louisiana Sign-up

The Consolidated Farm Services Agency (formally the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service or ASCS) recently released the following tentatively accepted parish WRP acres covering the 1994 Louisiana sign-up.

Parish	Acres
Avoyelles	1,694.5
Caldwell	525.2
Concordia	1,044.9
Franklin	3,299.1
Madison	4,404.9
Natchitoches	802.6
Tensas	155.5
Total	11,986.7

It should again be emphasized that this acreage breakdown is preliminary and subject to change.

Defining Wetlands

Wetlands commonly occur in transition zones between well-drained uplands and true aquatic habitats. Delineating a clear wetland boundary, however, can be very difficult. Developing a widely accepted wetland definition is also complicated by the diversity of wetland types, functions, ecosystems, and regions.

Until the late 1980s, three federal agencies, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE), used their own definitions of wetlands to identify the land over which they had jurisdiction. After wetland protection rules were added to the 1985 Food Security Act (1985 Farm Bill), the Soil Conservation

Service (now the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)) also became involved in wetland delineation on agricultural lands.

Although the COE has the greatest involvement in regulating wetlands, the lack of a single wetland definition for all agencies led to confusion. Landowners were often given mixed signals on agency jurisdiction and wetland determinations.

To help alleviate misunderstanding, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOA) was signed by the four federal agencies in 1994 authorizing the use of the 1987 wetlands delineation manual until the National Academy of Sciences completes a wetlands definition review. Additionally, the MOA gives the NRCS authority to make wetland determinations on all agricultural lands and certain adjacent lands owned by agricultural producers. NRCS will be training district conservationists in each parish this spring in an effort to begin gearing up for their expanded wetland determination/delineation role nationwide.

In the 1987 Wetlands Manual, wetlands must posses hydrophytic vegetation, hydric soils, and wetland hydrology. A brief description of these terms is below:

> Hydrophytic Vegetation - Vegetation that is dominated by plants that require or prefer wet soils.
>
> Hydric Soils - Soils that are wet and anaerobic (lacking in oxygen) during the growing season.
>
> Wetland Hydrology - The hydrology criteria are based on the depth from the surface to the water table and the length of time the water table remains at that level.

A one-week wetland delineation training course will be offered May 1-5, 1995, by the LSU Wetland Institute in Baton Rouge. This course, will prepare participants for COE Wetland Delineator Certification. For more information about this course call Dr. Steve Faulkner at the LSU Wetland Institute at (504) 388-8792.

Reference: North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service

Certified Wetland Delineators' List

Over the past two years, I have received numerous calls from landowners and developers seeking the services of a certified wetland delineator to make wetland determinations/delineations statewide. To help respond to these requests, I would like to compile a list of all certified wetland delineators working in Louisiana. If you are certified and would like to be included in a delineators directory, please call my secretary at (504) 388-2266 and provide your name, address, phone, and fax number.

"Operation Quackback" Expands Statewide

As I reported in the last newsletter, Vermilion Parish rice growers and supporting organizations were honored in September 1994 for initiating a special rice field waterfowl habitat program known as "Operation Quackback." Because of the outstanding success of this program in Vermilion, the program has now been expanded to cover the entire state. The statewide program will be a cooperative effort of the LSU Agricultural Center's Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, and the Louisiana Rice Growers Association. Even though specific details of the expanded program remain to be worked out, sign-up has already started in additional rice-growing parishes.

Operation Quackback started last year when eight Vermilion farmers volunteered some 1,500 acres to be flooded during the winter to provide habitat for migratory waterfowl. Farmers are also asked to voluntarily hunt mornings only. Additional habitat benefits are also provided for mammals, shorebirds, and migratory song birds found along the coast. By the end of 1994 the acreage enrolled had expanded to more than 5,500 acres.

Rice farmers receive no financial assistance for participating in this program, but waterfowl use can result in reduced red rice and other weed seed in the flooded fields. Fewer weeds can also result in reduced chemical weed control in the future. Participating farmers receive a free Operation Quackback sign that can be placed on their property showing that they are part of a wildlife conservation program.

Excellent wintering habitat in Louisiana and other Gulf Coast states helps send ducks back to their breeding grounds in the prairies of the northern U.S. and southern Canada in good physical condition.

For more information about Operation Quackback, contact your parish county agent or call Dr. Jim Fowler, Extension Wildlife Specialist, at (504) 388-4141.

Activities and Dates To Remember

Activity	Sponsor	Date	Location
Mgt. of Estuaries and Coastal Waters: Tools for Local Government	EPA	2/7-2/8	New Orleans
3rd Gulf of Mexico Symposium	Gulf of Mexico Program	3/29-4/1	Corpus Cristi, TX
Barrier Island Workshop	Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana	4/20-4/21	UNO
La. Remote Sensing GIS Workshop	NBS, DEQ LSU, USL NMFS & others	4/18-4/20	Lafayette

For more information about any of the topics discussed in this newsletter or to obtain wetland or coastal resource-related educational information, contact your parish Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service office.

Sincerely,

Paul Corell

Paul Corell, Area Agent
(Wetland and Coastal Resources)