

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
REGULATION DEVELOPMENT SECTION

PUBLIC HEARING RE:

COMPREHENSIVE COASTWIDE ECOSYSTEM
RESTORATION FEASIBILITY STUDY

Held at the LaRose Civic Center
307 East Fifth Street
LaRose, Louisiana
February 6, 2003, 6:00 p.m.

REPORTED BY:

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None offered

MR. ST. PE

Ladies and gentlemen, we want to welcome everybody. My name is Keri St. Pe. I am the, my paying job, Director of the Barataria Terrebonne Estuary Program. When I drove up here tonight and saw all the cars out there, I got really excited, I thought there was a big bunch of people coming here and then realized I was in the wrong room, there's a weight watchers convention going on, but I did loose 10 pounds. I wanted to announce that.

My job tonight is to welcome you and to give you a brief idea of what we are going to be doing tonight. I do want to introduce several people that are out in the audience. We have Ms. Karen Geatreux, who is the Special Assistance to Governor Mike Foster on Coastal Matters and, by the way, she was a past Director of the Barataria Terrebonne National Estuary Program. We have State Representative Loulan Pitre, in the audience, who is currently the Vice-Chairman of the Barataria Terrebonne Estuary Program. I see we have Ms. Gerry Theriot representing Congressman Tauzin's office. We have several of our Lafourche Parish, Gerry why don't you raise your hand, nobody saw

you. We have several representatives from our Parish Council, Mr. Lindel Toups, Mr. Darryl Marlborough, and Mr. Joe Petina. Did I miss any councilmen? Those are the three I recognized. Mr. Daniel Lerang and we also have State Senator Richard Dupre, who has another engagement he has to run off to, but he asked if he might say a few words of welcome. And, we certainly wanted to give him that opportunity. Senator, would you like to say a few things?

SENATOR DUPRE:

Thank you. You can see I need to belong to the Weight Watchers meeting, too. In Baton Rouge, Carrie looks so much like Windell Curole some people can't tell them apart. No, I just want to welcome y'all here. I know we have some people from out of town here. We are probably going to have the best attendance of all in your Feasibility Meeting, I think the next one is in Morgan City. But, over here, you're preaching to the choir as far as the need for Coastal Restoration. My senatorial district is all of Souther Lafourche and Souther Terrebonne. My district is the most eroded or the worst coastal wetlands loss in the world.

That is our number one issue in this part of the state.

We do plan on, Representative Pitre and I, will be filing several duplicate bills to try to facilitate our efforts and one of our big goals is to make coastal restoration one of the top of the agenda for the next gubernatorial election this coming year. We feel that it has never risen to that level so by, some of the bills we are planning on filing, that's sort of our ulterior motive, what you're going to see.

I think the biggest bill you are going to see us file, and we have full support of the Governor's office on it, and it was announced by the Chief of Staff of the Governor's office, Andy Coplin, every years, there is some big lawsuit involving severance taxes or mineral payment for the State of Louisiana. We are going to file a bill that states that non-recurrent revenue due the State of Louisiana derived from lawsuits or settlements or judgements involving severance taxes or mineral payments shall be dedicated to coastal restoration activities. Right now, it is dedicated to the state debt. Now, ten years ago that was the big

buzz word, the state debt was out of control. Since then, since Governor Foster came in in '96, the state debt has been brought under control and it's under the constitutional limits now. So, this is truly the state crisis. This is his idea. He wants -- you know we have a state bird, we have a state flag, we have a state dog and a state flower. Well, Loulan is going to be filing a bill, and I will file a duplicate, but this is his main idea. We are going to have an official state crisis in Louisiana. The state crisis is going to be coastal wetland losses.

So, I thank y'all for coming. You're preaching to the choir as far as the constituents here, we are all in big, big support of what you're trying to do. Thank you.

MR. ST. PE:

Thank you very much Reginald. And certainly I know that our other representatives and parish councilmen may have a few words to say during the comment period.

My job here today is to serve as your host and that's a high honor for me because I represent a

program that believes completely that it's -- we must involve the public in these processes to discuss how we are going to save our homes. It's critical. We cannot wait to tell the public what we are going to do right at the end, and the public comes out and objects to the way that we are restoring systems. It would put a halt to everything. We all know we don't have that time. Our homes are disappearing.

These lasts minimal hurricanes we had were so alarming. It shouldn't been a surprise because it's those wetlands out there that are protecting us. But, they were alarming because the storms were so minimal, but yet the storm surge was so great. One thing that protected us is our levees.

I want to tell you that there's going to be a few ground rules tonight and everyone will have a chance to comment. The main reason for this meeting, though, is to get your opinions about what is being presented here tonight. We are going to have two presentations. The first presentation is going to be from Mr. Jon Porthouse of D&R. Our second presentation is going to be by Ms. Sue Haas,

from the Corp. of Engineers.

There's been a whole lot of work being done over the last several months, just really given a chance. It's hard to even go to all the meetings.

There's just so much happening. What's going on is, the State of Louisiana, is going to be making a case for a lot of money. It's estimated that we need, in Louisiana, 14 billion dollars, billion dollar, to address our problems, fix most of them.

I personally think that's a conservative estimate.

We all know what Florida went through, the everglades. They got 8 billion, 8 billion; correct? 8 billion dollars. Now, the process to get 8 billion dollars, you can imagine, is quite complicated and there's a heck of a commitment that must be made by that state. Congress just doesn't give billions of dollars to people without a plan.

So, there's been a whole host of people, in the process of developing that plan and kind of fine tuning everything that has happened to this point and getting down to exactly what projects we are going to be putting in and where.

There's a lot of things we can do to restore

the system. Some of them are going to be more acceptable to the public than others. So, what is happening, is all the people, that are working on this, but all these ideas together, and you are going to see those tonight. They want to know which of these you favor the most. Which ones are acceptable to you. Which ones are not acceptable to you. They want that info. This is critical. This is so critical that you're here tonight. I was on Tuck's radio station, a couple of mornings ago, and made a comment that I hoped to have 2,000 people here. This is something that's just unbelievable as far as it's importance to our future. I don't know if people aren't believing us, but, this is critical.

You know how humans are, we humans don't come out until something happening at our backdoor and I guess that's what going on right now. But, this place should be overflowing. And not just because there's a Weight Watchers convention. But, this is a good turnout. We are very happy that you're here and these people are going to value your opinions.

They want to hear.

When you walked in tonight, you saw a table and hopefully you signed your name and gave your address. If you have an email address you wrote that down, hopefully. If you didn't, please do that before you leave. And you saw two cards. One was a public meeting registration form, small card.

This is for people who want to make a statement tonight. I know, nobody likes to make statements unless you're used to public speaking. We're not public speaking tonight. Tonight, you're speaking to family. You're trying to tell your Governor what you want, what you are willing to accept. That's what they want to hear. That's why they are here. They want to hear your comments. Don't be afraid. I am not going to be correcting any grammar. I don't speak good anyway. So, y'all just come up, and don't be afraid to speak, come up and do it. You might think you need to be some technical expert to say anything about this, you do not. That's not what we want to hear. We don't want to hear from the technical experts. We want to hear from your expertise based on what you do and what you know and your life experiences. Now, the other thing that you may have seen, hopefully,

is a slightly larger card. Now, this is for you people who absolutely do not want to speak or even if you want to speak, but you want to have written comments. The postage is already on it, you don't have to pay for a stamp. You can write your comments on it and throw it in the mailbox and it will get to the right people and your comments will be recorded.

Okay. I think I covered most everything. But, in order to give you just a little overview, about what you're going to see, so that you can be trying to listen, Jon's presentation is going to be, let's say, two main subjects. He's going to give you a historical perspective just to kind of remind us about all the efforts that have happened to this point. Kind of a historical perspective of coastal restoration efforts. And, he is also going to describe the process that they have been using over the last bunch of months to get us to this point. He wants your comments on his presentation, public involvement, the process being used, what you think about that process. Do you see any need to improve it? Is it just right? Whatever, he just wants to hear, and we all want to hear, what your comments

are on that.

Now, what Sue is going to do, Sue's going to present the current land loss situation based on the absolute latest data available. There's been some brand new data that has just come out, well, I'm not going to give a presentation, but you're going to be interested in seeing that. Now, she's also going to present, in her part of the presentation, she's going to show you where projects are being considered and she is going to tell you a little bit about it. She, and everyone here, wants to hear your comments about those. Normally at these things, people come up and they give some comments, they have something to say, that's good. Say what you got to say, give us your comments, but please, remember at the end, try and give comments about what you saw. Give us your opinion. That's really why they are here. Mainly to hear your opinion on what they are presenting and any new ideas on what you have.

I think I covered everything so far. So, if you haven't signed up, your welcome to go back, you're not going to interrupt us, just go back there and sign in. And we will begin with the

first presentation from Mr. Jon Porthouse.

MR. JON PORTHOUSE:

Thank you, Kerri, for introducing all of this and acting as our host. And thank you all, Senator Pitre and local government officials for coming out. It is like preaching to the choir here and it's a pleasure to that because we know that the energy here is what's going to carry thing through to success.

What we want to do tonight is just a couple of things. Number one, introduce you to what the study is and is not. It's been a while since we've been out here talking to you about how we are going to implement Coast 2050 plan. So, it's about time we came out and told you exactly what we are trying to accomplish. So, in many ways, what we are about to do is try to orient you towards the next series of public meetings. We are going to give you enough information tonight so you can get yourself oriented to the process, now what's coming up in the future and know how to participate in the process.

There is a couple we want you to walk away with tonight. The first thing we want you to walk away

with tonight is just that, an understanding of what this reporting process we are entering into is going to do for you. It is different than a traditional Corp. of Engineers feasibility study. You need to understand that and understand why. The differences are key to putting these projects on the ground faster. And, we hope you walk away by understanding those differences.

Second thing, we hope you walk away with tonight, is understanding just where we are in the process. Actually documenting the technical things we have to document and where we are going over the next couple of months in terms of technical analysis to come back to you to present some more information.

The last thing we want to do tonight is give you an idea, I know most of you know already, but some of you do not, how to stay informed. How to keep track of what we are doing and some ideas on how you can participate. Because, believe it or not, everybody in this room needs to participate to make this thing a success. So, if you keep those three things in mind, and I don't get to you at this presentation, I urge you to come up to the

microphone and tell me I forgot to say something so I can explain these things a little bit more.

Beginning the presentation. This is nothing new to you. You do live down here at the furthest expanse to the area where the wetland loss problem is the worst. Many of the problems are caused by things like levees and canals. Things that been done in good faith because they have

that live and work in this wetland environment but have had unattended consequences by disrupting hydrology and other natural process. So, that's the bottom line, we've interrupted natural processes. These things like subsidence, and faulting, and storms, but then there were thousands of years with the deltas built up. Now, we are no longer counter balanced by all the fertilization to the marshes, they just keep up so they are dying. You all know that.

So, a little bit of history. The first real big nod in the federal government that there was a problem down here was in 1965 when they authorized the structures that eventually became the Davis Pond and Kenard structures. For various reasons this went unfunded until the mid 80's and once the

mid 80's came around the state put up 25% of the money for these structures when they went on the ground. But, this was nod from the federal government that there was a problem.

1976, this is the authorization for the basis of our study where congress said please go back, look at all the projects you put out there, tell us how we can modify them to address the environmental problems. 1989, that's when the state got into the business and passes Act 6, provided the necessary funding and staff resources to participate in the restoration program allowing in 1990, the federal government to follow suit, the Breaux Act. This has been the dominant program for coastal restoration.

They had a plan in 1993, which was in affect a little while, until we introduced the Coast 2050 plan in 1998. Many of you participated in that process. Working through what needs to happen, fundamental ecosystem to make this a healthy place that we can all continue to live in. One of the first documents to really pull together the fundamental nature of the restoration, and got to the big pictures that we needed to go after.

2002, last year, we sat before the House of State and National Resources Committee. We signed an agreement with the Corp. of Engineers to initiate this effort we are here to talk to you about. But, we always put this up here and it says "comprehensive study" and we understand that word "study" doesn't sit well with many people. It doesn't sit well with us either. It's just an unfortunate term what we have in the federal process. What we are doing here tonight is not more study. We do understand the problem. What we are doing tonight is developing a report that we can send to congress for action. Do not get concerned when you see the word "study".

A note on the magnitude of the problem. Again, this is nothing new to you folks. Everything we've done by this point, by this estimate, 28% of the problem is being addressed. There's obviously a big step up in efforts that needs to occur. So, our goal, obviously, a federal and state commitment to where, a large scale, a multi-billion dollar restoration program. We had Coast 2050 in 1998. It was conceptual in nature and it was remarkable in that it was approved and bought into by all 20

coastal parishes. However, for us to be successful, you have to go beyond coastal parishes.

We've got to convince the rest of the state that this is something in their interest. We've got to convince the rest of the nation that it's in their interest. And that, in some ways, has not been one of our strong points, but, we are addressing that right now.

The way we are going to obtain this commitment is developing a report to go before congress in 2004 stating the problems, laying out our perceived solution and getting their _____.

So, the objectives again, July 2004, we have a report that goes to congress that lays out the problem and how we're going to solve it.

Collaborative effort of agencies is extraordinarily important. You all know the successes of the Breaux Act largely stem from the fact that we had six different agencies that participated, the Corp., the State, EPA, Wildlife, NRCS, _____ fisheries. In addition to that, for this effort, we have enlisted the help of other agencies, Department of energy, transportation,

FEMA, the USDS, the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries with the state. The collaborative effort of agencies goes beyond just a local level. The Breaux Act largely is limited to the local level. What we are trying to do with this effort, we've had a lot of success recently, getting the regional offices from Dallas, from Atlanta involved in this, from Vicsburg and then on up into Washington. We've had a lot of coordination with the Washington level. The consensus is beginning to develop that there is a need for action and most of all the federal agencies are buying into us and they are an active part of the process.

We are looking for a programmatic authorization. We are not looking to just submit a list of fully engineered projects here because, if you do that, you end up with a list of fully engineered projects and you have no way to put them on the ground. One of the things, this is a key difference we need to go over, this report we are sending up is going to emphasized on the process. How can we get this program implemented. How can we have projects on the ground faster. Laying out the state and federal responsibilities. We are

getting money from congress, money from the state to do the engineering, do the design and put the projects on the ground. This report is going to be heavy on that. It's going to have an implementation plan defining who's got to pay what.

How much is it going to cost and it's going to be based on the adaptive management. It's basically the best science that's out there. In trying to make a case to the rest of the country, it doesn't do any good to say "we think this is a good idea, this is how we are going to do." You've got to be able to convince them that we've put our heads together, we've got the best scientists in the country and that we are really working on this problem, this technical solution is sound. That's a key part of this.

Report content. Just so you know, traditional feasibility report used to go heavily into the engineering details. Where is it going to be, how big is it going to be and how much time. Those sorts of things. This report is going to be different, as I said.

The first thing is the important parts. The

developing a consensus. What's going to happen to coastal Louisiana by 2050 if we do nothing else? We have to show people, as you already know, there is a problem down here that needs people's attention. This includes a little bit more in-depth analysis on the economics state than other problems. It will have a recommended plan of sorts with more detail poured on top of the Coast 2050 strategist. But, as I said, it's not going to be specific as to all the actions. We are not going to be able to say "we are going to put a 15,000 CFS diversion in this spot, right here." It's going to be a bit more general than that because, number one, we don't have the time to get to that level but it's just easier, at this point, to say between mile 10 and mile 30 number, we need a diversion of this size. And then proceed to the detailed engineering in 2004 once we get the approval. So, that's another key point. All the documentation is not going to be done before we put projects on the ground in 2004.

Plan implementation strategy is another big piece. Again, how are we going to get the money. How are we going to put it into projects on the

ground. How are the federal and state governments going to staff this thing, get the design work done. Where are going to get the money? How much are we going to pay to the federal government and state government. How are we going to keep the best science involved so they are understanding, through implementation, the program continues to develop the project, the plan components keep better and better, _____ understanding.

And this last pool. Delegated authority is our major time savings in the future to get these things on the ground. Typical process, these things go from the district, to the Corp. of Engineers, through division, through head quarters, to the Assistant Secretary of the Army, to the congressional committees for debate, to the full congress for the debate authorization to get your money.

What we are trying to do here, by implementing this program, is maybe in a few cases, lower that level of authority so that when we have a planned component that's ready to be built, congress will already have said "we believe this is a good idea.

You don't have to come back to the full congress

to debate this item for item. You can come back and meet just the committees, maybe, the Assistant Secretaries level and build these projects. It really saves a lot of time not going to that last level of debate.

Programmatic environmental impact statement. Many people are aware of the normal environmental impact statement where we go through every little thing and say "these are the impacts. This is what you can expect in this location." Because of the nature of the report and the lack of specific details on the sites and size, we are not going to be able to do that. We are going to have to more frame the issues of "these are the projected impacts if we do this sort of action." But, it leaves it again, the steps that we are going to have to go through once we get this program approved in 2004 to get these projects on the ground.

Solutions. Everybody knows the solutions. Put the rivers back in the estuaries. Make sure the barrier shore lines are there keeping the Gulf in the Gulf and away from our wetlands, our bays and our homes. Salt water intrusion control down here,

I know you guys are especially aware of this one getting _____. Keep the salt water in the salt water parts of the estuaries, keep the fresh areas fresh. These are all the basics of what we are trying get into right now in planning.

Traditional process of above. This is perfect if you are trying to build one project. Do you feasibility study, do your combine level of design, you build it and operate it. This, what we are trying to do here, you know, Coast 2050, has 86 strategies in there that we are trying to do. We are not going to be able to do one thing at a time.

We are going to have to be able to do many things at the same time. For instance, this little red line, I guess you can't see that too much, LCA comp, at the bottom. This is where we are right now. This margin between the red and the yellow, that's July 2004. We are putting that plan before congress for approval. The big yellow bar is where we start the final level of engineering design to actually get the money we need to put the projects on the ground. So, what this is showing you, is that we will be doing design, construction and operation, all at the same time. It's just what we

are going to have to do and are beginning to show you the complex nature, how difficult it's going to be with so many large things into the mix at one time. But, this report is going to help us work through that process.

There are three proposed levels of authorization by congress that are going to go into this report. First group is full authorization for funding. We can go out right now, in 2004, do have engineering build that project. That's the first level. We may have projects in that level for this report.

Second level, is the level that refers to the delegated authority part of that nature. We will have convinced congress that it's a great idea, that we need to do it, but we haven't just perfectly nailed down all the documentation so we have to go back there for some sort of lower level authorization.

And the last group is the one where we just did not get any detail at all and congress did not feel comfortable delegating any sort of authority. How the plan components are going to be mixed between these three groups is not clear at this time. We

have not figured that out. The criteria we used to sort them out, we are working through that right now. So, we can't tell you exactly how that's going to work now, but we are going to have various levels of authorization. The bottom line is, some projects will get on the ground fairly quick. Some of them are going to take longer.

Plan formulation is the part Ms. Sue Haus is going to talk to you about in a few minutes. It's the effort that says "all right, we've got these great concepts in 2050 plan, what does that mean for us? We want to put it on the ground." She's going to go over the beginnings of that with you.

The next bunch of them, those are the sorts of technical analysis we have to do. Those are the ones we are not going to be able to finalize in this reporting process of 2004, but those things are the ones we have to address before we put projects on the ground. All the social economical analysis, environmental analysis, cultural analysis, we have to do that environmental impact statement before we can implement these projects.

Then the last one, public involvement. That's why you're here. That's why we're here. What we

want you to know tonight, is how you can be informed on the process and we've got several ways that are familiar to you. Several ways that are new. And, we hope you implement, or take advantage of all of them and anything that we don't have, we hope you send that suggestion in so that maybe, we can put that into action too.

What's the best way to keep you guys informed.

Fist one, very obvious, Kerri St. Pe said this is for registration here, whether or not you want to make a comment. But, you know, it's got an address thing on it. If you did not get a public meeting announcement mailed directly to your home, you need to fill this card out so that we have your name and address and we can send it to you in the future. Don't leave without filling this out, if you didn't get one directly.

Breaux Act News Flash. If you access to the internet, an email, you can go to the Quipper website. We'll tell you how to do that if you don't already know and sign up for the Breaux Act News Flash. It's an email news letter that tells you what's going on in coastal restoration, not with this coastal area feasibility study but with

the Breaux Act, with other things, meetings, those kind of things you want to be informed of and involved with. So, that's an incredibly important to have access to. Attend public meetings, you guys got this one down. You are here. Thank you.

Bring a friend next time to sit in the rest of the chairs so we can fill this room. And really, if we have to go find a bigger place, that's the best scenario for us because we need your support.

Visit our website, www.coast2050.gov. We are trying to keep this updated with the latest thinking, the latest processes of what we are doing, so every couple of weeks, go back and check to see if anything has changed.

Before you come to a public meeting, you should go to this website because these presentations that were given are going to be there for you to look at. You can download them and look at all the comments, you can see the script of the presentation so you don't have to come in here and get it cold. You don't have to come in here and listen to me tell you this for the first time. You can digest it for yourself at home, come in, listen to me, if I still haven't answered your questions,

then you can really focus in on just what you want to know. That's going to help us out a lot and that's going to help you out a lot so we don't just through stuff at you.

Request of presentation, your local school, civic, religious, trade or environmental group, a couple of nights ago, at Belle Chasse, someone actually did this. We were shocked. He got up to the microphone and invited us to meet with his group so next Tuesday, we are going to go meet with some people. So, that was perfect. Somebody, right there, from the meeting, took advantage of that.

How can I participate? Several ways. Kerri also held up the comment card.