

# THE CONVEYANCE



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## "We Are Drowning"

*Residents focus on loss of life and land in effort to gain coastal restoration funds.*

As a life-long resident of Terrebonne Parish and coastal Louisiana, Kenny Smith says he always keeps an orange life vest in his car. This spring, when the president of T. Baker Smith & Son, Inc. traveled to Washington, D.C. with a group of other local business people and elected officials, he wore the life vest in order to clearly illustrate the risk our area faces as a result of coastal land loss.

"We are drowning," Smith told federal officials and members of Congress. "If we don't act now in implementing the \$14 billion in restoration projects required to preserve our coast, I'm afraid the next time you hear about Terrebonne Parish on CNN or read about us in *U.S.A. Today* will be because two thousand or three thousand people have drowned in the wake of a hurricane," he said.

As the nation braced for war in Iraq the week of March 16, Smith and other Houma-Terrebonne Chamber of Commerce representatives calling themselves the "Coastal Rescue Committee" were in our nation's capital for the second time in two years to share our story about coastal erosion and our vulnerability to deadly storms. Since members of the Louisiana congressional delegation are strong champions of coastal issues, committee members decided to expand their meetings to include representatives of federal agencies that will play an integral role in the authorization and funding of Coast 2050. The message was clear: Louisiana's wetlands loss is a national problem that requires immediate national attention. And despite the looming war, participants say their efforts appear to have made an impact, especially with agencies like FEMA, EPA, the Maritime Administration and Department of Energy.

"After very productive meetings with these groups, I believe they recognize the significance of our coast to the nation and the urgent need to halt land loss," says ROR Executive Director Lori LeBlanc. "If we are to get



Members of the "Coastal Rescue Committee" met with senators, congressmen and federal agency representatives in Washington, D.C. March 16-19.

### Rep. Hunt Downer Addresses Congress

The potentially tragic loss of energy infrastructure due to coastal land loss was the focus of testimony delivered by Rep. Hunt Downer of Houma to members of the U.S. House Energy Committee March 19. He was accompanied by Rep. Loulan Pitre of Cut Off. Downer called for Louisiana to receive a greater share of offshore oil revenue for environmental and infrastructure projects as compensation for services the state provides to deepwater oil and gas production in the Gulf of Mexico. Port Fourchon and LA Highway 1, as Downer explained, support 16 percent of the nation's entire energy supply, but their very existence is constantly threatened by land loss and the encroaching salt water of the gulf.

"Louisiana is fighting two wars: a war on terrorism that threatens physical security, and, at the same time, we're fighting a war with Mother Nature in terms of coastal erosion," Downer said.

## Mark Your Calendar

GRAND ISLE TEAM CITY  
FINE ARTS EXHIBITION  
May 1-11

BAYOU REGION DAY  
AT THE LEGISLATURE  
May 6, 2003  
2:00 - 8:00 pm

## From the President... Alex Plaisance

The NWS map in this issue depicting Hurricane Lili's projected path has become a chilling reminder of Louisiana's coastal land loss crisis. The map's storm surge forecast demonstrates all that is at risk for those living in South Louisiana and for the entire nation. Look at this map and consider all that we stand to lose with respect to our ecological habitats, our infrastructure, our economy and our culture if we do not take drastic measures to restore this coast. While we cannot stop Mother Nature, we can work together to restore our natural protection that will ensure our long-term survival and a sustainable system from which the entire nation benefits. Please continue to support ROR's efforts to save what we cannot afford to lose.

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### Mission Statement

Realizing that the Barrataria and Terrebonne basins are the two most rapidly eroding estuaries on the earth, and understanding that an economic and ecological travesty is occurring, the concerned members of Restore or Retreat seek to identify, expedite and aggressively engage in solutions to urgently achieve comprehensive coastal restoration.

### BECOME A MEMBER/VOLUNTEER

Contributions to this organization are **tax deductible**. Restore or Retreat is a 501(c)(3) organization. Tax identification number is 72-1474850. Please make checks payable to Restore or Retreat, Inc.

#### Levels of Support:

Platinum	\$10,000 or greater	Bronze	\$1,000 to \$2,499
Gold	\$5,000 to \$9,999	Associate	\$100 to \$999
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I would like to support ROR, my donation is enclosed.

I would like to be an active volunteer, please contact me.

Return form to: ROR, P.O. Box 2048-NSU, Thibodaux, LA 70310



## From the Executive Director.... ROR's Lori LeBlanc

With all that is going on in the world today we are fortunate that we have been able to maintain, and even continue to build the momentum behind Louisiana's coastal restoration efforts. A special thanks to Governor Foster for

keeping this issue a top priority and for taking the message all the way to Louisiana's delegation in Washington D.C. Now it is our job to ensure that the momentum continues until we are successful in implementing a large-scale comprehensive restoration program. With the America's Wetland Campaign to Save Coastal Louisiana, proposed coastal legislation for the 2003 regular session, the newly published *Bayou Farewell*, and state and federal agencies working on the LCA programmatic feasibility study, we are headed in the right direction to take advantage of this window of opportunity.

In addition, DNR Secretary Jack Caldwell recently informed us that DNR is close to finalizing a contract with a national engineering firm, CH2MHill, for the Third Delta Conveyance Channel (TDCC) feasibility study. The study will be separated into four phases, which will enable DNR to modify the components of the study as it progresses through the evaluation. The TDCC feasibility study will eventually merge with the LCA study for congressional authorization. While we cannot emphasize enough the need to expedite the large scale projects, we are grateful to DNR for doing so with the TDCC project.



### **"Bayou Farewell" ROR to Offer Tidwell Book**

*Mike Tidwell is not a Louisiana native or even a resident, but his appreciation for our vanishing coast and the culture it has produced has made him an influential advocate for those who have lived and worked here for generations. Tidwell, author of the newly released, "Bayou Farewell: The Rich Life and Tragic Death of Louisiana's Cajun Coast," has crafted an interesting story using the powerful voices of local residents like Windell Curole of the South Lafourche Levee District and Kerry St. Pe of the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program that is sure to get national attention for Louisiana's coastal restoration efforts. Thanks to Tidwell and publisher Pantheon Books, ROR has been authorized to sell "Bayou Farewell" directly, with proceeds to benefit our programs. To order a copy of the book and support the efforts of ROR, call (985) 448-4485.*

## Coastal Issues Highlighted in Legislative Session

At least two local legislators are committed to making coastal restoration an important issue in the 2003 regular session of the Louisiana Legislature. Sen. Reggie Dupre of Montegut and Rep. Loulan Pitre of Cut Off have filed bills aimed at raising awareness of coastal land loss, increasing funding for restoration projects and limiting the state's liability. Other legislators have signed on as co-sponsors of the proposed legislation.

Increasing the funding capacity of a state wetlands fund is the focus of two bills filed jointly by Dupre and Pitre. HB 663 would eliminate the existing cap on state mineral revenues now directed into the Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Fund (WCRF), a fund which serves as a source of state match dollars for federal restoration projects. HB 669 authorizes the state to direct non-recurring revenue into the WCRF. This includes mineral settlements, which in the past, have been used to pay down state debt.

Through two proposed constitutional amendments, HB 424 and HB 428, Pitre also plans to limit the state's liability in coastal restoration projects. The first proposal would authorize the Legislature to limit damages paid to private landowners affected by coastal restoration projects, while the second would allow the state to limit its general liability for these projects.

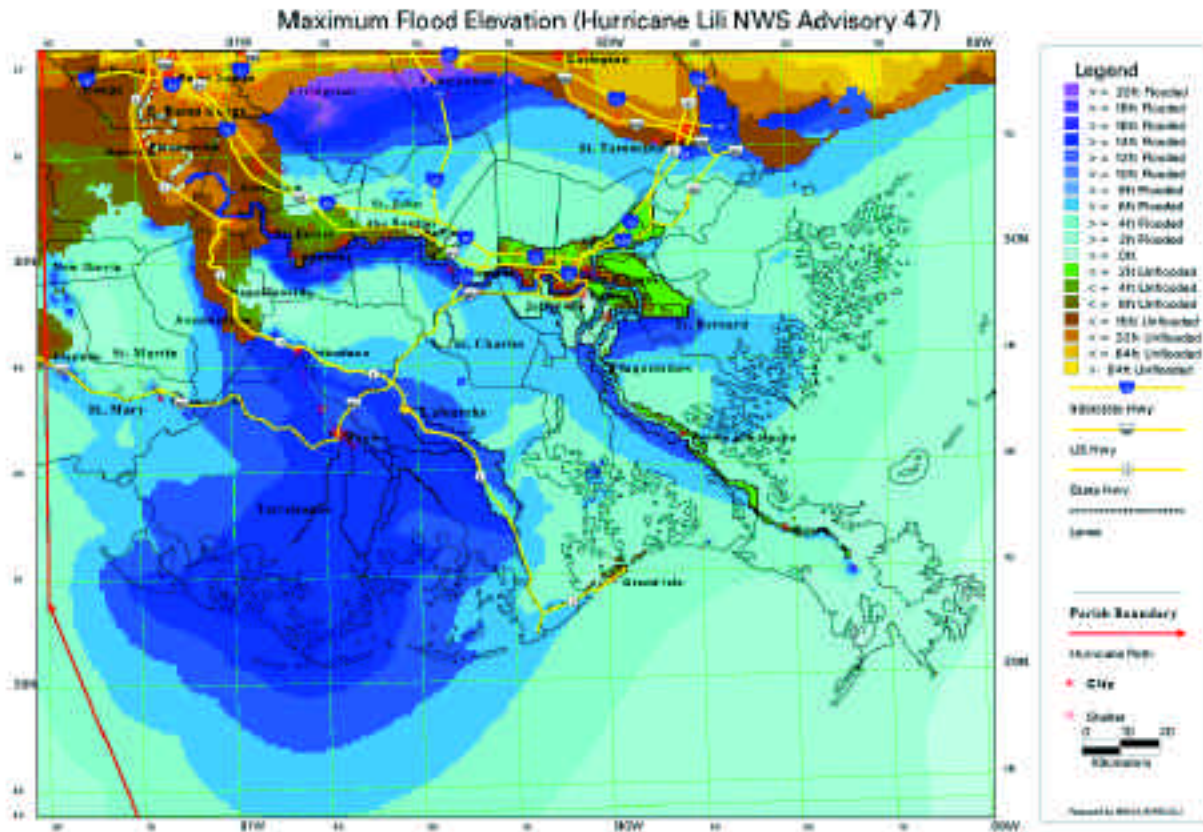
"We're seeking to protect the state from enormous liability judgements awarded to private landowners, like we've seen with oyster leases involved in restoration projects," Pitre explains. "These outrageous judgements not only cost the state in money, but time as well. Our wetlands need immediate attention and we just cannot afford any avoidable delays."

***"Our wetlands need immediate attention and we just cannot afford any avoidable delays."***

***- Rep. Loulan Pitre***

Other legislation filed by Pitre and Dupre and supported by the local delegation would help raise awareness of the coastal land loss issue and provide additional funding for restoration efforts. HB 70 recognizes coastal land loss as the official "state crisis," and calls for the America's WETLAND logo to appear on state documents. Another proposal provides for all standard Louisiana license plates to feature the words "America's WETLAND," replacing "Sportsman's Paradise" in 2004, while a similar bill would create the America's WETLAND prestige plate with funds raised earmarked for coastal issues. Bumper stickers on public vehicles are the focus of a final bill, authorizing the placement of stickers reading, "America's WETLAND: Campaign to Save Coastal Louisiana" on state-owned cars and trucks.

# If Hurricane Lili Continued on Her Projected Path: 14 Feet of Water in Downtown Houma



## Campaign Kicks Off "America's WETLAND Trail"

As the America's Wetland(AW) Campaign to Save Coastal Louisiana gains steam in its efforts to spread the word nationally about Louisiana's valuable and vanishing wetlands, it has also unveiled plans for a tourism trail featuring cultural and environmental stops that help tell the story of Louisiana's coast. The "America's Wetland Trail" officially kicked off March 18 at Avery Island during an AW conference attended by south Louisiana government, tourism and non-profit representatives who are partners in the AW campaign, as well as staff from the offices of Governor Mike Foster, U.S. Senator John Breaux, U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu and U.S. Congressmen Billy Tauzin.

The first America's Wetland Trail flags were presented to Paul McIlhenny of the McIlhenny Company on Avery Island, and to Lake Charles Mayor Randy Roach whose city plans to construct the America's Wetland Discovery Center on the banks of Lake Charles to serve as the AW Trail's western welcome post.



Terrebonne, Lafourche and all bayou parishes will be eligible to develop their own sites for the trail. An AW Trail Summit is tentatively planned for the fall of 2003.

## "We're Drowning"

-continued from page 1-

funding on the magnitude of \$14 billion for Coast 2050 projects, we need to do all we can to raise national awareness of the Louisiana coast to the same level as that of Chesapeake Bay and the Florida Everglades. That's why presentations like these by the people who live and work in our region are so important."

One of the tools used to convey the risk faced by coastal Louisiana in the face of continuous land loss was a weather advisory issued by the National Weather Service on the evening of October 1, 2002, with Category 4 Hurricane Lili barreling through the central Gulf of Mexico. The forecast map (shown above), which projected landfall just west of Terrebonne Parish, also predicted a tidal surge resulting in over 14 feet of water in downtown Houma. It's a map that at least one New Orleans meteorologist referred to as he warned Terrebonne and Lafourche parish residents to evacuate the area if at all possible, and if not, to prepare for winds strong enough to lift roofs off of their homes. To members of the Coastal Rescue Committee, this map illustrates better than any other the extreme vulnerability of more than 100,000 people to hurricanes in the absence of coastal wetlands—our natural line of defense.

"Tragedy may have been averted this year, but for every mile of wetlands that is lost, the risk of losing lives in a storm increases. Hurricane Lili was a loud wake-up call for coastal restoration that cannot be ignored," said Sen. Reggie Dupre.