

COASTAL ZONE

Newsletter


February 2024

West Shore Lake Pontchartrain Levee

Construction of the West Shore Lake Pontchartrain (WSP) Hurricane Risk Reduction Project continues. Col. Cullen Jones (pictured below), commander of the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) New Orleans District, signed three sets of plans and specifications for contracts 103, 109, 114a of the WSP Hurricane Risk Reduction Project on January 19th, 2024. USACE anticipates awarding contracts to contract these the second quarter of 2024. These contracts include more complex design features beyond levee construction, such as floodwalls, utility crossings, a vehicle crossing ramp, and two drainage structures.

In total, eight of thirteen sections of the levee are under construction, ranging from 1% to 60% complete. Additionally, USACE has completed pile load testing at all three sites: Prescott Canal, I-55, and Reserve Relief Canal.

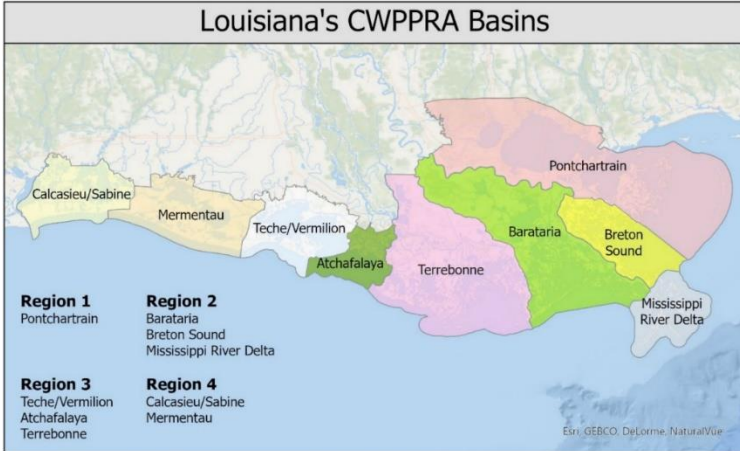
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Regular updates on the WSP Levee can be found on the [Army Corps' WSP Website](#) or [Facebook Page](#).

Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act Season Begins

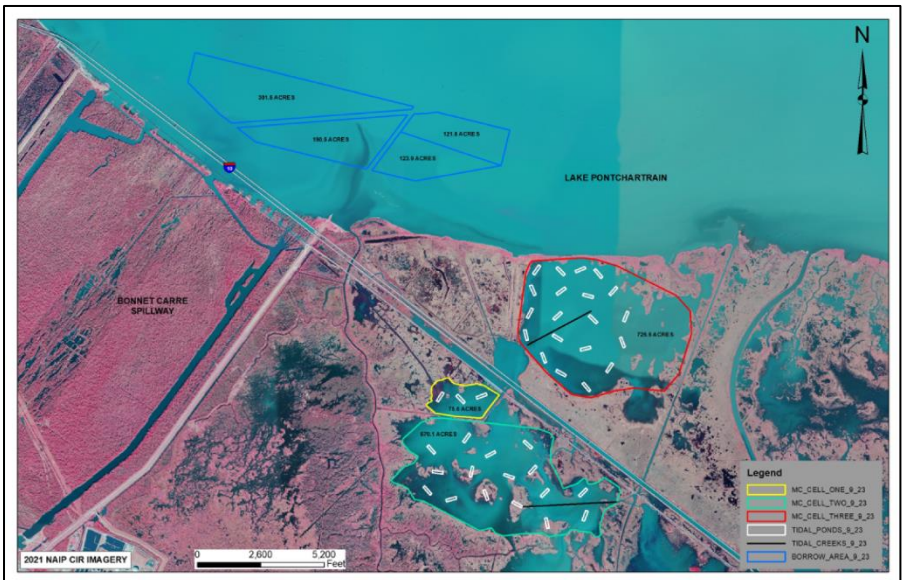


The Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) was federal legislation enacted in 1990 to fund the design and construction of coastal wetlands restoration projects. Since 1932, approximately 25% of the wetlands in Louisiana have been converted to open water because of human development and severe weather events. Activities such as channelization, oil and gas infrastructure, subsidence, and sea level rise have negatively impacted our coastal wetlands. These areas

provide natural protection against flooding and damages caused by storms and are in need of restoration. CWPPRA projects are implemented by a task force comprised of the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, USACE, the US Environmental Protection Agency, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Department of Agriculture, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Every year, state and federal agencies work with local parishes and landowners to develop new project proposals. The Priority Project List (PPL) is made up of projects in regions across the coastal zone and voted on first by local governments. The projects that make it through this phase are then ultimately evaluated further and some are selected by the Task Force for funding and implementation.

CWPPRA At Work: LaBranche East Marsh Creation Update

One example of a CWPPRA project is the LaBranche East Marsh Creation Project located adjacent to the Bonnet Carre Spillway, just east of St. John the Baptist Parish. Approximately 2,000 acres of marsh creation are anticipated. Dredged fill material will be pumped from Lake Pontchartrain into marsh creation cells that are contained by 33,000 linear feet of constructed dikes. The project will benefit the Lake Pontchartrain Estuary Basin by improving the overall environmental quality and provide storm protection through storm surge buffering. The project is expected to be completed this year.



St. John Secures Funding through Louisiana Watershed Initiative for Homewood Drainage Improvements

In December 2023, the Council on Watershed Management voted to approve 40 flood risk reduction projects for the Louisiana Watershed Initiative's (LWI) [Round 2 funding opportunity](#). Eligible projects must benefit low to moderate income communities and parishes impacted by the 2016 floods. The total conditional amount awarded for Round 2 projects was \$221.8 million.

St. John the Baptist Parish was awarded \$14 million in funding for the Reserve Relief Homewood Pump Station Replacement and Drainage Improvement Project. The project, located in Reserve, will install a new pump station, culverts, catch basins, and a detention pond to benefit the Homewood Subdivision off of Airline Highway. The subdivision experiences flooding during severe rain events. The current pumping capacity is inadequate for the needs of the area. The project will drastically increase the drainage capacity of the neighborhood, and ensure lives and properties are protected in the event of potential flood waters.

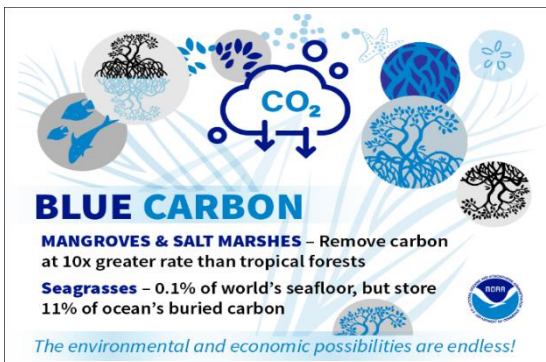


Reserve Relief Canal ([L'Observateur](#))



Depth gauge at Reserve Relief Canal ([nola.com](#))

Quantifying Blue Carbon



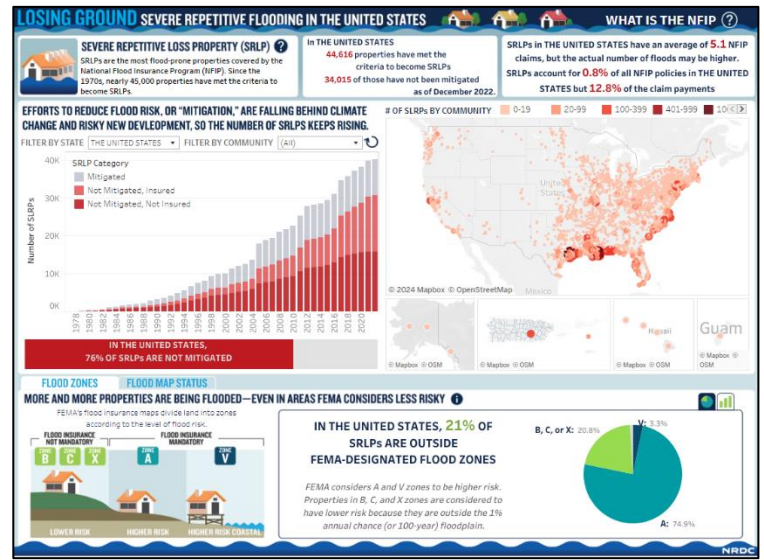
Blue Carbon refers to carbon that is absorbed by aquatic and wetland plants. Protecting and restoring blue-carbon ecosystems provides support to wildlife, improves water quality, assists in storm surge protection, and benefits local economies. The U.S. Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is advancing projects that remove and capture carbon. A total of \$12 billion dollars have been invested so far. Restoration of the coastal ecosystems helps offset emission projects and blue carbon can be traded on carbon financial markets.

Efforts are underway to study and quantify the benefits of blue carbon capture in Louisiana's Coastal Zone. There is significant interest state-wide because Louisiana's Coastal Master Plan outlines billions in spending on coastal restoration efforts. [The Water Institute has been working since early 2022](#) to identify partners and funding opportunities to help the state leverage voluntary carbon markets and incentivize private investment in coastal restoration projects. Quantifying the benefits of coastal restoration can help Louisiana meet its climate action goals, and potentially contribute to state matching fund requirements for federal protection projects.

Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) Report on Severe Repetitive Loss Data

Last month, NRDC released a report highlighting the status of severe repetitive loss (SRL) properties in the US. Determined by flood insurance claims, SRL properties are structures that have filed four or more flood claims with the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) over a ten-year period or filed two flood claims that exceed the value of the structure in that same time frame. There are 44,616 properties across the country that meet the SRL criteria. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides data on properties that are prone to flooding to NRDC. This data only captures f properties insured by the NFIP.

NRDC created a flood data visualization tool that provides information on homes in communities that are frequently flooded. Over the past four years, flood related disasters have increased, resulting in an increase in the number of properties affected. You can read NRDC's report, *Losing Ground: Severe Repetitive Flooding in the United States* [here](#) and you can view the Flood Data Visualization Tool [here](#).



Urgent action needed on flooding –

1. **NFIP Updates:** Improve equity, accessibility, and affordability of flood insurance.
2. **FEMA:** Update minimum NFIP land use standards and building codes.
3. **Grants:** Create more accessible and equitable in offering homeowners buyouts or other mitigation actions.
4. **State:** Enforce building and land use codes and ensure homeowners are informed of their flood risk.

St. John the Baptist Parish Coastal Updates

Airline and Main Update



Project under construction and on schedule.

Funded through the Office of Community Development, this project will improve pedestrian and cyclist safety and reduce flood risk through green infrastructure and drainage enhancements. Construction should be substantially complete in February or March and finished later this year.

Sunset Park Shoreline Restoration



Currently in Engineering and Design.

St. John the Baptist Parish has secured a grant through CPRA’s Conservation and Restoration Partnership Fund to design and construct a shoreline restoration project in Sunset Park along Lake Maurepas. Contract approval is complete, and the Parish is seeking additional funding through the Louisiana Outdoors Forever grant.

Resilient Housing Plan



Draft plan coming soon

After securing a grant from Smart Home America, Planning & Zoning contracted the Louisiana-based consulting firm Desire Line, LLC to develop a Community Resilience Housing Plan. The project aims to create a stronger post-disaster housing framework for the Parish and serve as a pilot for future communities along the Gulf Coast. The draft Resilient Housing Plan is complete! Planning & Zoning anticipates the draft plan will be ready for public comment and review by the Parish Council in February.

BRIC Direct Technical Assistance



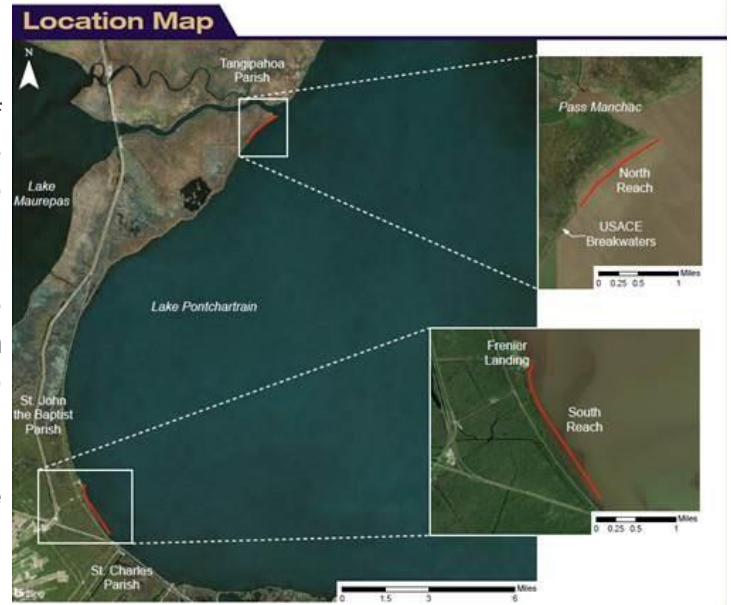
Technical Assistance identifies drainage improvement project.

Planning & Zoning and Public Works are engaging with FEMA’s Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program to receive technical assist with project prioritization and development to address flood risk. The Direct Technical Assistance Team has submitted a full BRIC application to the Governor’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP) requesting funding for a scoping study to fully evaluate the drainage issues along Highway 51 at I-10/I-55, and develop a project scope to address those issues. The application will first be reviewed by GOHSEP before submittal to FEMA.

Lake Pontchartrain Shoreline Protection

Construction beginning next month.

Construction of a breakwater on the western shore of Lake Pontchartrain between the St. Charles Parish line and Frenier is set to begin next month. The shoreline has eroded approximately 10 feet per year since 1915. The breakwater will reduce erosion, stabilize the shoreline, and build back additional land through the accretion of sediments. The parish received through the 2006 Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act to complete the project and issued \$9.5 million in bond in 2019 to obtain this money up front and complete the project. Construction on the southern reach of the project should be complete within a year.



St. John
 The Baptist Parish

Coastal and Water
 Management