

COMMUNICATING LOCAL AND REGIONAL STRATEGIES FOR COASTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN LOUISIANA

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Coastal Louisiana communities face tremendous risk from climate change and other natural and human drivers. These risks include inundation from land subsidence and rising sea levels, habitat degradation, extreme weather events, and hazardous materials spills. While severely threatened by both sudden and long-term impacts of hazards, this coastal and inland region is critical to the livelihood and economic well-being of the state and the nation. Of special importance in this regard are the seafood industry, energy sector, and shipping/navigation. Given that these industries are fixed to coastal locations, there is limited capacity for businesses and populations to migrate inland even under scenarios of increased risk. This coastal region is made up of small towns and major cities – all of which are vital to the survival of these industries, but who struggle to become more resilient. Sustainability of the Louisiana coast and its communities depends on both local adaptation and regional ecosystem restoration strategies on a scale never before proposed. Uncertainty in both of these approaches requires a range of communication and outreach efforts to gain public support.

This presentation will focus on two inter-related efforts by the Louisiana State University (LSU) Coastal Sustainability Studio (CSS) to produce visualization and communication tools that convey to the public both current and future risk, the responses to this risk in coastal Louisiana. The work of LSU CSS is trans-disciplinary and focuses on research, design, and outreach that raises awareness of the dynamic Louisiana environment and works to reconcile the seemingly discordant goals of community resilience and ecosystem restoration.

The first effort we will present involves the production of visualizations (e.g. drawings, illustrations, animations) about the science of coastal restoration. Working with both state agencies and NGOs, CSS developed materials intended to educate and foster a public understanding of the state's coastal restoration efforts. A central focus of this work has been to examine proposed large-scale sediment diversions, which are a particular point of contention with the public and are highly controversial because of their potential to radically alter ecosystems. We will discuss the intent of these visualizations as tools to enhance larger restoration-support programs, as well as the difficulty in disseminating this work to the broader public.

The second of these efforts, which builds on the CSS-driven Louisiana Resiliency Assistance Program, focuses on building stronger, more resilient communities in the Louisiana context, particularly in light of environmental indeterminacy and risk. The opportunity CSS focused on was the disconnect between land-use planning, hazard mitigation planning, and implementation processes developed for the Louisiana Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast. CSS developed outreach materials and processes to better connect these essential yet disconnected processes. In particular, we will present both graphics and outreach tools (e.g. online resources, local planning workshops, continuing education efforts) employed to disseminate information on planning efforts, resources, and best local practices to build networks around resiliency planning in Louisiana. We will discuss how these efforts dovetail with other planning processes, and how successes and challenges are guiding future CSS efforts.