

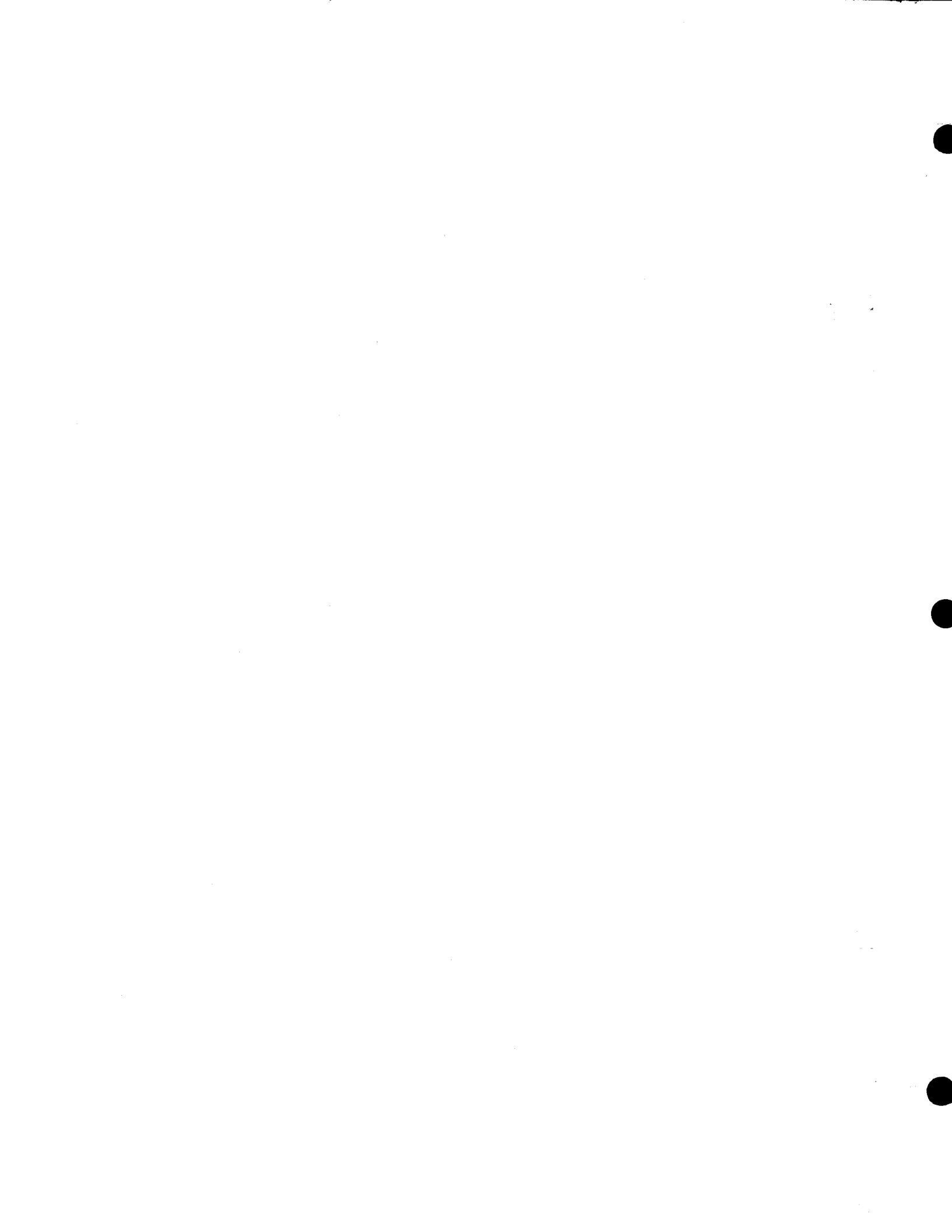


6th PRIORITY PROJECT LIST REPORT

PREPARED BY:

**LOUISIANA COASTAL WETLANDS CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION
TASK FORCE**

April 1998



Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act

6th Priority Project List Report

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INTRODUCTION

The State of Louisiana contains about 40 percent of the Nation's coastal wetlands. Louisiana's coastal wetlands are experiencing losses at a rate of approximately 80 percent of the Nation's total coastal wetland loss rate. This is a disproportionately high level of loss, compared to nation-wide rates. In addition, the coastal wetland loss problem in Louisiana is extensive and complex in nature. Agencies of diverse purpose and mission that are involved with addressing the problem have proposed many alternative solutions. These proposals have had a wide spectrum of approach for diminishing, neutralizing, or reversing these losses. A global observation of these efforts by Federal, state, and local governments and the public has led to the conclusion that a comprehensive approach is needed to address this significant environmental problem. In response to this, the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (Public Law 101-646) was signed into law by President Bush on November 29, 1990. This report documents the implementation of Section 303(a) of the cited legislation.

STUDY AUTHORITY

Section 303(a) of the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA, or the Breaux-Johnston Act), displayed in Appendix A, directs the Secretary of the Army to convene the Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force to:

. . . initiate a process to identify and prepare a list of coastal wetlands restoration projects in Louisiana to provide for the long-term conservation of such wetlands and dependent fish and wildlife populations in order of priority, based upon the cost-effectiveness of such projects in creating, restoring, protecting, or enhancing coastal wetlands, taking into account the quality of such coastal wetlands, with due allowance for small-scale projects necessary to demonstrate the use of new techniques or materials for coastal wetlands restoration.

STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this study effort was to prepare the 6th Priority Project List (PPL) and transmit the list to Congress, as specified in Section 303(a)(3) of the CWPPRA. Section 303(b) of the act calls for preparation of a comprehensive restoration plan for coastal Louisiana; that effort was completed in November 1993, with the submission of the Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Restoration Plan.

PROJECT AREA

Plate 1 is a map that delineates the Louisiana coastal zone. The entire coastal area, which comprises all or part of 20 Louisiana parishes, is considered to be the CWPPRA project area. To facilitate the study process, the coastal zone was divided into nine hydrologic basins (refer to map).

STUDY PROCESS

The Interagency Planning Groups. Section 303(a)(1) of the CWPPRA directs the Secretary of the Army to convene the Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force, to consist of the following members:

- the Secretary of the Army (Chairman)
- the Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency
- the Governor, State of Louisiana
- the Secretary of the Interior
- the Secretary of Agriculture
- the Secretary of Commerce.

The State of Louisiana is a full voting member of the Task Force except for selection of the Priority Project List [Section 303(a)(2)], as stipulated in President Bush's November 29, 1990, signing statement (Appendix A). In addition, the State of Louisiana may not serve as a "lead" Task Force member for design and construction of wetlands projects of the priority project list.

In practice, the Task Force members named by the law have delegated their responsibilities to other members of their organizations. For instance, the Secretary of the Army authorized the commander of the Corps' New Orleans District to act in his place as chairman of the Task Force.

To assist it in putting the CWPPRA into action, the Task Force established the Technical Committee and the Planning and Evaluation Subcommittee. Each of these bodies contains the same representation as the Task Force -- one member from each of the five Federal agencies and one from the State. The Planning and Evaluation Subcommittee is responsible for the actual planning of projects and preparation of the November

1993 comprehensive restoration plan, as well as the other details involved in the CWPPRA process (such as development of schedules, budgets, etc.); the subcommittee makes recommendations to the Technical Committee and lays the groundwork for decisions which will ultimately be made by the Task Force. The Technical Committee reviews all materials prepared by the subcommittee, makes appropriate revisions, and provides recommendations to the Task Force. The Technical Committee operates at an intermediate level between the planning details considered by the subcommittee and the policy matters dealt with by the Task Force, and often formalizes procedures and formulates policy for the Task Force.

The Planning and Evaluation Subcommittee established several working groups to evaluate projects for priority project lists and the restoration plan. The Environmental Work Group was charged with estimating the benefits (in terms of wetlands created, protected, enhanced, or restored) associated with various projects. The Engineering Work Group reviewed project cost estimates for consistency. The Economic Work Group performed the economic analysis which permitted comparison of projects on the basis of their cost effectiveness. The Monitoring Work Group established a standard procedure for monitoring of CWPPRA projects and developed a monitoring cost estimating procedure based on project type.

The Citizen Participation Group. The Task Force also established a Citizen Participation Group to provide general input from the diverse interests across the coastal zone: local officials, landowners, farmers, sportsmen, commercial fishermen, oil and gas developers, navigation interests, and environmental organizations. The Citizen Participation Group was formed to promote citizen participation and involvement in formulating priority project lists and the restoration plan. The group meets at its own discretion, but may at times meet in conjunction with other CWPPRA elements, such as the Technical Committee. The purpose of the Citizen Participation Group is to maintain consistent public review and input into the plans and projects being considered by the Task Force and to assist and participate in the public involvement program. The membership of the Citizen Participation Group is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Membership of the Citizen Participation Group

Gulf Coast Conservation Association	Concerned Shrimpers of America
Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana	Gulf Intracoastal Canal Association
Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation	Louisiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, Inc.	Louisiana Landowners Association
Louisiana League of Women Voters	Louisiana Nature Conservancy
Louisiana Oyster Growers and Dealers Association	Louisiana Wildlife Federation, Inc.
Midcontinent Oil and Gas Association	New Orleans Steamship Association
Oil and Gas Task Force (Regional Economic Development Council)	Police Jury Association of Louisiana
Organization of Louisiana Fishermen	

Involvement of the Academic Community. While the agencies sitting on the Task Force possess considerable expertise regarding Louisiana's coastal wetlands problems, the Task Force recognized the need to incorporate another invaluable resource: the state's academic community. The Task Force therefore retained the services of the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium (LUMCON) to provide scientific advisors to aid the Environmental Work Group in performing Wetland Value Assessments. This Academic Assistance Group also assists the Task Force in carrying out the two feasibility studies authorized by the Task Force in March 1995: the Louisiana Barrier Shoreline study (managed by the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources) and the Mississippi River Sediment, Nutrient, and Freshwater Redistribution study (managed by the Corps of Engineers).

Public Involvement. Even with its widespread membership, the Citizen Participation Group cannot represent all of the diverse interests affected by Louisiana's coastal wetlands. The CWPPRA public involvement program provides an opportunity for all interested parties to express their concerns and opinions and to submit their ideas concerning the problems facing Louisiana's wetlands. The Task Force has held at least six public meetings each of the last six years to obtain input from the public. In addition, the Task Force distributes a semiannual newsletter with information on the CWPPRA program and on individual projects.

PLAN FORMULATION PROCESS FOR THE 6th PRIORITY PROJECT LIST

BACKGROUND

The planning effort associated with the CWPPRA initially proceeded simultaneously along two tracks. Section 303(b) of the act calls for the development of a comprehensive restoration plan for Louisiana's coastal wetlands. This long term plan was developed over a three-year period, with the report (the *Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Restoration Plan*) completed in November 1993. Section 303(a), on the other hand, deals with projects which can be implemented within a short period of time. This section requires that any project selected for a priority project list be substantially complete within five years of its appearance on a list. The intent of this section is to provide a rapid response to the loss of coastal wetlands. The first Priority Project List was to be submitted within one year of enactment of the CWPPRA, with subsequent lists to be prepared annually.

Section 303(a) actually requires that priority project lists be submitted only until such time as the comprehensive restoration plan called for in section 303(b) has been prepared. Projects can then be drawn from the comprehensive plan. In practice, however, the Task Force has found the annual priority list process to be an effective means of developing projects and has continued to use that process -- without the five-year implementation limit.

The one-year time limit associated with developing a priority project list necessitated a deviation from the usual plan formulation process. Rather than beginning with a clean slate, it was preferable to begin with projects which were already developed to some degree. The emphasis was to develop where possible projects on which some planning had already been done. The projects on the First Priority Project List submitted in November 1991 fell into this category.

Preparation of subsequent lists involved somewhat more lead time than did the first list and employed a more traditional approach. This section describes the process by which the 6th Priority Project List was developed.