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## 8th PRIORITY PROJECT LIST REPORT

PREPARED BY:

LOUISIANA COASTAL WETLANDS CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION  
TASK FORCE

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Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act  
(Breau Act)

8<sup>th</sup> Priority Project List Report

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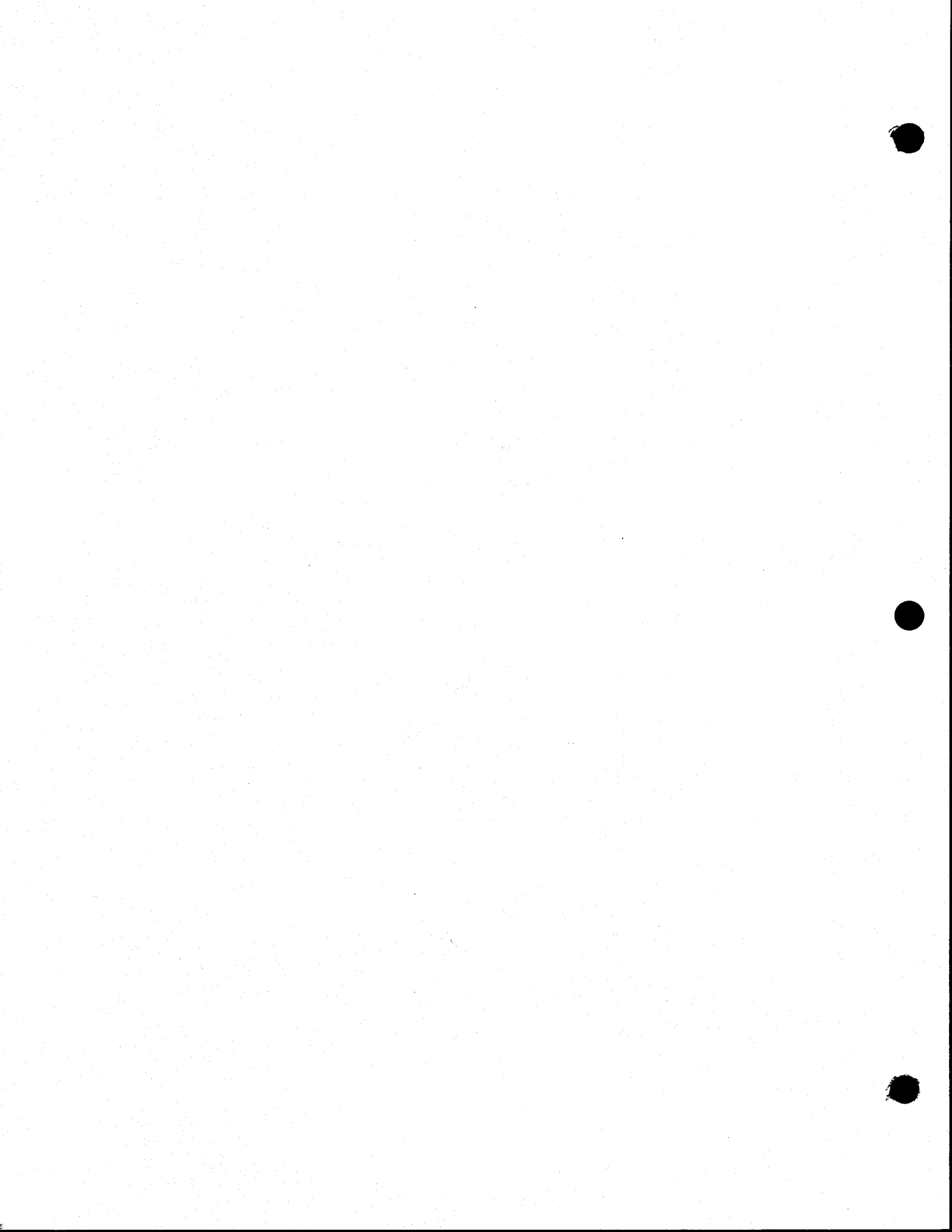
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INTRODUCTION

The State of Louisiana contains about 40 percent of the Nation's coastal wetlands in the lower 48 states. The wetlands, bays, and islands of coast constitute an enormously productive ecosystem. For example, Louisiana coastal wetlands and adjacent areas contribute nearly 30 percent by weight of the total commercial fisheries harvest in the lower 48 states, and on the average, provide overwintering habitat for 50 percent of the migratory waterfowl using the Mississippi Flyway, as well as significant numbers of waterfowl using the Central Flyway. Unfortunately, Louisiana's coastal wetlands are also experiencing about 80 percent of the coastal wetland loss in the lower 48 states, a disproportionately high rate of loss. The problem is extensive and complex, involving 9 separate hydrologic basins. To address the problem, Federal and State agencies have proposed many alternative solutions, providing a wide spectrum of possible means for diminishing, neutralizing, or reversing these losses. In addition, a global observation of these past 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 Breux 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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

A map of the Louisiana coastal zone is presented in Plate 1, which indicates project locations by number of Priority Project Lists 1 through 8. Plate 2 contains a listing of these project names, referenced by number and grouped by sponsoring agency, for each Priority Project List. 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 of Plate 1).

#### 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.

The Task Force established the Technical Committee and the Planning and Evaluation Subcommittee, to assist it in putting the CWPPRA into action. 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, as well as the other details involved in the CWPPRA process (such as development of schedules, budgets, etc.). This subcommittee makes recommendations to the Technical Committee and lays the groundwork for decisions that 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. 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

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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	

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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 feasibility studies authorized by the Task Force. These include:

- The Louisiana Barrier Shoreline study -- March 1995 - March 1999 (managed by the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources), and
- The Mississippi River Sediment, Nutrient, and Freshwater Redistribution study -- March 1995 - ongoing (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 CWPRA 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 eight public meetings each of the last eight years to obtain input from the public. In addition, the Task Force distributes a quarterly newsletter with information on the CWPPRA program and on individual projects.

## PLAN FORMULATION PROCESS FOR THE 8<sup>th</sup> 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 that 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. This allows the Task Force to consider the most effective projects to address the state of wetlands loss on an annual basis.

Typically, Priority Project Lists are completed within a one-year time limit. The relatively short time period 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 that were already developed to some degree. The emphasis was to develop where possible projects on which some planning had already been done, although this was not absolutely required for a project to receive consideration. The projects on the First Priority Project List submitted in November 1991 fell into the former category of these.

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 8<sup>th</sup> Priority Project List was developed.