

ONE to ONE

An Update on the Efforts of the LA 1 Coalition

Fall 2002

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The Story After the Storms

LA 1 Coalition Surveys the Damage to Our Highway



Tropical Storm Isidore left mounds of debris on LA 1 when tidal waters receded.

Fortunately, no lives were lost in the heavy rains and fierce winds, however, the storms' impacts on our coastal infrastructure were far from negligible. Barrier islands south of Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes, recognized as our first line of defense against devastating storm surges, took a substantial beating from the winds and waves of Isidore and Lili. And as expected, LA Highway 1, the only highway leading in and out of the busy oil and gas industry hub of Port Fourchon, was covered by several feet of water and impassable hours before each storm even neared our coast. The road's condition was the topic of several national news programs and newspaper articles.

"I think these storms reinforce the warnings that we have been giving for several years now," explained LA 1 Coalition Executive Director Roy

Francis. "In the event of even the smallest storm surge, the only evacuation route for the thousands of employees working out of the Port Fourchon service area can be underwater within hours. If Hurricane Lili would have made landfall as the Category 4 storm predicted, the highway could have been totally washed out, paralyzing a majority of deepwater oil and gas activity in the central Gulf."

But while catastrophe was avoided this year, LA 1 has suffered irreversible damage. According to Francis, since the road bed was saturated with water from the storms, it is now unable to hold up to the weight of heavy trucks resuming travel to and from Port Fourchon. The result is the beginnings of a crumbling and fracturing highway.

Photos of these impacts and other storm-related documentation will be used extensively by Coalition represen-

The warnings were issued and evacuations ordered as area residents hoped for the best while preparing for the worst. Such was life in South Louisiana from September 25 through October 3 when TROPICAL STORM ISIDORE and HURRICANE LILI set their eyes on the region.

tatives during a planned trip to the nation's capital later this fall to push for federal funding of a new, elevated highway.

"Especially today, with military intervention looming in the Middle East, secure and dependable access to our domestic energy supply should become a high-priority issue," Francis concluded.



Following Tropical Storm Isidore, the natural boundary between land and water along LA 1 in Leeville was seemingly nonexistent.

How Low Can We Go?

Researchers Measure Road Sinkage Along LA Highway 1

Researchers from the LSU Spatial Reference Center and NOAA's National Geodetic Survey conducted a post-Hurricane Lili survey of La Highway 1 at the end of October. The survey measured the current elevations of the roadway and the potential for flooding during future storms. One of the serious results of coastal land loss and subsidence of Louisiana's coastal areas has been that evacuation routes have experienced a decrease in elevation and are now more exposed to open water conditions along the Gulf and coastal bays.

"What you saw with Tropical Storm Isidore and with Hurricane Lili is that many evacuation routes flooded quickly, making it very hard for coastal parishes and towns to get people out of harm's way," said Dr. Roy Dokka of the Louisiana Spatial Reference Center. "Our coastal evacuation routes in Louisiana are the life lines we depend on and we need to look at how vulnerable they are to being flooded by storm surge and future storms."

LSU Spatial Center staff and members of NOAA's National Geodetic Survey began the survey during the weekend of October 19 in Grand Isle, and then continued north along the highway over the next week. Using GPS-based survey equipment placed along the road and mounted on a truck, the field team was able to determine the present-day elevations of LA 1 from Grand Isle to Raceland, where it intersects with U.S. Highway 90.

"We appreciate the work of both LSU's Spatial Center and NOAA in helping us in our efforts to rebuild and expand LA 1," said LA 1 Coalition Executive Director Roy Francis. "Knowing the elevations of our highways and what we need to do to prepare for the future growth of our state are important in protecting the residents and industry of South Lafourche."

The work of LSU and NOAA is a demonstration project that will help assess the need to survey and study other hurricane evacuation routes. Hurricane evacuation planning is a key element in the state's approach to protecting coastal populations from future storms. A final report on the survey's findings is expected in November.



The Leeville Bridge stands like an island during Tropical Storm Isidore. High tides, strong winds and currents played a role in three boats colliding with the Leeville Bridge on three separate occasions between September 27-29, following Tropical Storm Isidore. In all three incidents, the bridge was closed until the boats could be removed, and traffic was stuck on the south side for hours.

Project Updates

Final EIS Issued

The La DOTD issued the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in September for the LA 1 improvement project between Golden Meadow and Port Fourchon. The EIS will be recorded in the Federal Register, and after all comment periods are completed, the Record of Decision will be issued.

Proposals Coming In for Engineering and Design Work

The LA DOTD has advertised for proposals from consultants interested in conducting the engineering and design work for a new Leeville Bridge and a new span of highway between Golden Meadow and Port Fourchon. As we go to press, a contract has not yet been awarded.

Hurricane Evacuation Route Report Issued

An Environmental Feasibility Report for the extension of LA Highway 3235 from Larose to U.S. 90 was issued by LA DOTD on September 18. The proposed highway project is also known as the Hurricane Evacuation Route proposal and has gained widespread support from government and business groups in Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes.



Chairman's Report

-by Ted Falgout, Executive Director, Greater Lafourche Port Commission



All Eyes Focused on Us

Port Fourchon, together with LA Highway 1, has become the “Poster Child” of what’s at stake if nothing is done to save coastal Louisiana. Our effort to bring concerns about our deteriorating infrastructure and dwindling coastline to a national audience is proceeding at a rate faster than I could have ever imagined.

We are the “main attraction” for every political briefing, federal and state agency visit, and media group that is interested in the very serious issue of coastal land loss. Much attention came as a result of Isidore and Lili making landfall in our state, but much work has been taking place on other fronts as well.

Take, for example, Governor Mike Foster’s decision to declare war on coastal land loss with the creation of an Advisory Commission on Coastal Restoration and Conservation. The state has also launched a national media campaign to put the issue of coastal land loss right in front of the American people. It should also help put the spotlight on our specific efforts to improve LA 1.

The national campaign called “America’s Wetland” will focus on two major issues, the tremendous ecological disaster that is occurring as a result of coastal land loss and the threat that land loss is posing to our national energy supply. Our LA 1 sits “smack dab” in the middle of this nation’s two most

productive and rapidly eroding estuaries, and it leads to the heart of this nation’s energy supply. There is no better example of what is at stake if we continue to let our land simply wash away.

Powerful decision-makers have traveled to Louisiana recently to get a first-hand look at the issue. In just the last few months alone, we have had four key U.S. Senators travel to our state and learn about the serious condition of LA 1. These include Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu, Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, Sen. James Jeffords of Vermont and Sen. Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico.

program personnel from the Federal Highway Administration and LA DOTD. We’ve been on national television and national public radio, and would have hosted key White House personnel had it not been for two other visitors, Isidore and Lili. The White House visit is rescheduled for December and we will host the Federal MMS, OCS Policy Committee in November.

These are truly exciting and challenging times. I am more and more confident each day that the LA 1 Coalition will be able to timely achieve our aggressive goal of major highway improvements.

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As chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee and a member of the powerful Finance Committee, Sen. Jeffords’ comments about what he learned on his trip are quite promising.

“I understand the importance of this area as I never have before,” Jeffords said. When the appropriations bill is considered, he said he will have us “well in mind.” This alone is a tremendous feat, but there’s more.

We have had the newly appointed Colonel of the New Orleans District Corps of Engineers visit Port Fourchon, in addition to numerous other federal and state agency heads and officials. We have hosted numerous meetings with key



Sen. Jim Jeffords and Sen. Mary Landrieu toured South Lafourche by helicopter following Hurricane Lili to view the damage to our coastline and infrastructure.

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In previous "One to One" issues, we failed to list Abdon Callais Offshore, Coastal Commerce Bank, Community Bank, Allied Shipyard and Reggie Melancon as contributors. We apologize for the error.

THANK YOU!

The strength of the LA 1 Coalition lies in the support of our members. We thank each and every one of you for your generous contributions.

If you are a contributor but are not listed as such in this newsletter, please call us at (985) 448-4485.

For Your Information...

If you would like to receive additional copies of "One to One" or more information on the LA 1 Coalition, call Roy Francis, Executive Director, at (985) 448-4485 or write to us at P.O. Box 2048-NSU, Thibodaux, LA 70310. Our office is located on the campus of Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, LA, within the offices of the South Louisiana Economic Council. The LA 1 Coalition is a non-profit 501(c4) corporation. Editor: Jennifer Armand