



## Coastal 5+1

### The Biggest Impediments to Coastal Community Resilience

- I. Extremely incomplete knowledge among coastal residents (some 2.3 million people who represent 50% of the state's population) of the magnitude of the environmental challenges they presently face and will continue to confront with increasingly dire consequences (to life, property, and livelihoods).
  - A. Due to: long-standing mistrust on the part of coastal residents of government at all levels; lack of a tradition of community engagement in Louisiana's rural parishes; the State's reticence to arouse excessive fear among coastal populations; the unwillingness of parish governments to run the risk of losing their tax base; the costs associated with moving large numbers of coastal residents to higher land; excessive optimism on the part of State and local leaders that their 50-year \$50 billion Coastal Master Plan will reverse coastal wetland loss.

**Solution:** Greater access to knowledge through the use of advanced mapping technology that shows anticipated wetland loss in specific communities in ten-year increments over a fifty-year period, along with honest conversations about realistic adaptation options using locally-based and trusted intermediaries rather than governmental agencies. The key to successful knowledge sharing in this context is to remove government from the role of information broker.

**Why this is the Best Strategy:** Genuine knowledge sharing and community engagement will enable residents to make informed decisions about such things as 1) if it is safe to continue living where they are or whether they should consider moving further inland, 2) how to adapt in place to anticipated wetland loss and climate change, 3) the limits of adaptation in a highly dynamic coastal environment; 4) the costs associated with choosing to adapt in place; 5) a clear understanding of public v. private roles and responsibilities in adaptation.

- II. Unwillingness on the part of governmental at all levels to discuss when and how to move coastal populations who live in coastal areas that are unsafe and unsustainable. This leaves our state's poorest populations unable to move even if they are so inclined.
  - A: Due to: lack of a tradition of community engagement in Louisiana's rural parishes; the State's reticence to arouse excessive fear among coastal populations; the unwillingness of parish governments to run the risk of losing their tax base; the costs associated with moving large numbers of coastal residents to higher land; excessive optimism on the part of State and local

leaders that their 50-year \$50 billion Coastal Master Plan will reverse coastal wetland loss.

**Solution:** Organize coastal citizens around relevant issues originally through the aegis of knowledge sharing via locally-based and trusted agencies. Once armed with information about the multiple natural and political forces that confront them in their quest to make informed decisions about where to live, these citizens can be organized by the same local, *in situ* agencies and, once they achieve a certain critical mass, will acquire the clout to engage more proactively state and federal agencies to respond to their specific concerns.

**Why this is the Best Strategy:** Coastal wetland loss has implications that run through the heart of state's economy, culture, and political power structure. As we saw in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, parish governments that are left to their own devices will avoid making difficult decisions that are in the best interests of their populations. For example, after Katrina, St. Bernard Parish (the storm's biggest victim in terms of percentage of homes, infrastructure and population lost), did not introduce zoning requirements that required returning homeowners to raise their homes. To this day, 95% of that parish's homes remain slab-on-grade. Political leaders will not confront the most challenging issues inherent in wetland loss until their constituents demand a proactive approach to what is nothing less than an existential problem. A recent study by the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center reveals that a significant number of coastal residents with sufficient personal resources are responding to the threat of wetland loss with their feet. It is morally unacceptable to deprive poor residents of the ability to make the same choice. Equity in the fundamental issue of survival can be achieved only if state and local political leaders are openly confronted with the realities that they have thus far avoided publicly acknowledging. By equipping local communities with hard data on coastal land loss and emerging demographic movements, poor coastal residents will be able to demand an equal opportunity to relocate and prosper.

- III. The lack of a formula for compensating homeowners who will be forced to move because of deteriorating coastal conditions. While the State's updated Coastal Master Plan openly acknowledges the need to buy out certain homeowners and relocate them, no specifics are provided about how this will be accomplished. In rapidly deteriorating coastal areas where there is no market demand for homes, it is impossible to revert to "comps" as a means of determining "fair market value." This begs the question of what fair compensation should look like. These homeowners must be given sufficient resources to relocate to higher, safer ground. As if this matter weren't sufficiently complicated, the CPRA has not yet identified how the necessary resources for buying out these homeowners will be acquired.

- A. Due to: all of the factors mentioned above.

**Solution:** Provide resources to groups with the necessary legal and financial capacity (i.e., Louisiana Appleseed, Seedco Financial) to develop, in partnership with the State, an equitable formula for buying out homeowners who reside in highly dynamic, threatened coastal areas.

**Why this is the Best Strategy:** The State's coastal restoration authority is presently devoting all of its energy to ensuring that Restore Act dollars are dedicated to the coastal rebuilding projects it is outlined in its Coastal Master Plan. In addition, its staff lacks the expertise and political mandate to confront such a complicated and contentious issue head-on. By engaging the services of expert organizations that have been dealing with coastal property issues since the landfall of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, we can offer the State a framework for discussing what a buy-out program should accomplish: i.e., what fair compensation amounts to for residents who must purchase what is most likely to be a more expensive home further inland, how such a program should operate, which department within the State should operate it, how the necessary resources can be raised, etc.

- IV. Refusal on the part of commercial fishers (who number over 12,000) to engage in any fashion with the State and with other governmental entities on how best to implement coastal restoration projects, such as riverine diversions.
- A. Due to: a history of contentious interactions with government (over catch limits, mandated equipment use, and compensation in the wake of hurricanes, oil spills, and wetland loss), lack of formal organization on the part of Louisiana's commercial fishers, lack of political sophistication on the part of commercial fishers.

**Solution:** Provide resources to effective intermediaries who are trusted by commercial fishers and who engage frequently with them on a variety of issues to educate fishers about relevant issues and to connect them in proactive, productive conversations with governmental agencies.

**Why this is the Best Strategy:** If fishers remain on the periphery of critical coastal conversations, they will most likely try to obstruct state and federal coastal restoration efforts through legal challenges. This will result in the loss of critical time to implement planned coastal remediation efforts in an ecosystem that is reaching a tipping point. It will also deprive fishers of a voice in determining how best to implement restoration projects in a way that has the least negative impact on their already precarious incomes. By equipping trusted intermediaries with the resources to teach commercial fishers of the real dangers that their industry faces from continued wetland loss, we are much more likely to create the foundations for a collaborative relationship between fishers and governmental agencies that is based on honesty and mutual respect. In short, our strategy will benefit both the coast and our population of commercial fishers.

## Three Major Accomplishments to Date:

1. The Greater New Orleans Foundation provided the initial investment to create the Southeast Louisiana Commercial Fisheries Assistance Center, the nation's first one-stop shop providing business and personal assistance to commercial fishers. Operated by Seedco Financial, the Fisheries Assistance Center has leveraged over \$10 million in low-interest loans and grants to assist local fishers to recover from five hurricanes and one massive oil spill since its establishment.
2. Over the course of three separate grant cycles, the Greater New Orleans Foundation brought just over \$8 million to the aid of distressed coastal communities recovering from hurricanes and the Deep Water Horizon Oil Spill. Thanks to ongoing contributions from across the globe and a significant partnership with Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, we were able to further even some longer-term goals in workforce training and financial management for struggling commercial fishing families. Most notable among these latter initiatives was a novel outreach strategy specifically geared to the wives of our area's commercial fishers, who are frequently the ones who make household financial decisions and who are the first in their homes to pursue alternative ways of making a living when the fishing industry encounters hard times.
3. The desire to catalyze an integrated water management industry that offers quality jobs for local people, many of whom face economic hardship in traditional sectors like commercial fishing that were hit hard by the 2010 Gulf Oil Spill, led us to seek a partnership with the Idea Village (a New Orleans-based business incubator) to create a program that incentivizes aspiring water entrepreneurs to commercialize their inventions. Now in its third year, the annual "Water Challenge" offers intensive one-on-one mentoring to three finalists over the course of a ten-month period. These individuals and their associates are helped to complete and implement a viable business plan, to address intellectual property issues, and to perfect their pitch to an audience of international judges who determine which of them will receive the annual prize of \$50,000 that they must invest in the launch of their new business, along with support services from accomplished entrepreneurial advisors for an additional year. To date, the program has helped to kick-start seven new ventures and, even more importantly, has proven to be a key lever in moving the City of New Orleans to adopt a less costly, more effective integrated water management plan in several key neighborhoods. Much to our surprise and delight, the Greater New Orleans Foundation and Idea Village were awarded in 2012 with a "Nania Prize" for innovative collaboration from a Tulsa-based hazard mitigation group that had learned of our partnership.