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Recent Research In Coastal Louisiana:

# Natural System Function and Response to Human Influence

A Symposium  
1998

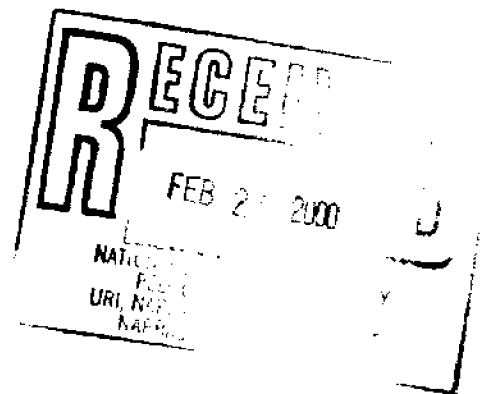


**Recent Research in Coastal Louisiana:  
Natural System Function and  
Response to Human Influence**

A symposium convened by the  
Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium  
February 3-5, 1998  
Lafayette, Louisiana

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## PREFACE

The coastal barriers, bays, marshes, and swamps of Louisiana compose one of the largest deltaic systems of the world. In contrast to many other deltas on Earth, where wetlands have been drained and barrier islands built upon, the Mississippi Delta Plain is still a highly productive ecosystem. It is, however, a system that had been dramatically altered from its natural state and a place where the challenges of managing and sustaining ecosystem function are faced every day. The research community in Louisiana has for many years been at the forefront in dealing with management issues and ensuring that decisions are made on the basis of the best available science. In the last decade with the advent of a large-scale wetland restoration program under the Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act, with increased awareness of the potential consequences of river diversions, and with a renewed effort to exploit subsurface mineral resources in the coastal zone, it has become essential that the research community be proactive in disseminating the most current scientific understanding to coastal managers and decision makers.

With this in mind, we convened a broad-based committee from amongst the research community working in coastal Louisiana to design a coastal research meeting. The goal was to provide an opportunity for dissemination and discussion of research findings among scientists, managers, and policy makers. The result was the conference 'Recent Research in Coastal Louisiana: Natural System Function and Response to Human Influences'. The conference was held in February 1998 in Lafayette, Louisiana. Over three days, 48 oral and 20 poster presentations were made to an audience of over 150 people. Plenary presentations by Charles Simenstad on wetland restoration in the Pacific Northwest and Ron Jones on the challenges of ecosystem management in the Florida Everglades provided a context for us to consider the problems we face in coastal Louisiana.

The conference was a great success, and the papers in this volume represent a partial record of the discussions that occurred. Scientific advances will continue and our understanding of system function will only increase. In that sense, the information presented here is a snapshot of the state of coastal science knowledge in the late 1990's. There are few venues where managers and researchers can openly discuss their observations, findings, and doubts. Perhaps more enduring, therefore, is the recognition that we all share a common goal of a sustainable, productive coastal Louisiana and that the best efforts of all are needed to get there.

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