



This was a place owned by wind and wings.... One's spirit widened to the great circle of limpid air; one's thoughts flew out as swift and uncaught as the wildfowl passing.

FLORENCE PAGE JAQUES writing about
Rainey Sanctuary in "The Geese Fly High" (1939)



Audubon's Paul J. Rainey Wildlife Sanctuary contains some of the finest coastal marshland left in Louisiana. Photo courtesy of Bruce Reid.

Louisiana Coastal Initiative

Restoring a Globally Important Ecosystem

For thousands of years, wetlands at the mouth of our continent's mightiest river – the Mississippi — have sustained a teeming multitude of life – from birds whose lives span the hemisphere to millions of people across the nation. But today, this vast deltaic ecosystem is collapsing, disappearing into the Gulf of Mexico at an alarming rate.

A Plan for Marsh Restoration

Louisiana's coastal wetlands are among the most threatened landscapes on earth. Since the 1930s, 2,000 square miles of marsh and swamp have converted to open water because of human manipulation of river flows and wetland hydrology.

For the first time ever, the White House has recognized the importance of safeguarding this vital ecosystem. The President has asked for funding in his budget to begin the work of restoration. Now Congress has the responsibility of turning those recommendations in to actual appropriations.

Funding to support restoration efforts is vital. It is past time to start undoing decades of destructive water flow and other management practices that bottle up the natural processes that build healthy wetlands and marshes.

- Louisiana's wetlands provide habitat for about 1.8 million migratory waterfowl (La. Dept of Wildlife and Fish 2008).
- The wetlands offer storm protection at the mouth of the Mississippi River which hosts 20% of all navigational commerce in the U.S. Five of the fifteen largest ports in the nation are located in Louisiana. (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 2007)
- Wetlands and coastal marshland provide crucial storm protection for the communities and wildlife habitat along the coast of Louisiana.
- Coastal wetlands provide habitat that supports recreational fishing, hunting and wildlife observation, activities that provide billions of dollars in revenue.
- In 2006, commercial fishing in Louisiana accounted for 21% of the total catch by weight in the lower 48 states. (U.S. Dept. of Commerce 2007)
- Louisiana wetlands protect important energy facilities that produce almost one-third of the nation's oil and gas.

How You Can Help

Ask your House Member and your Senators to support the \$36.5 million in the President's budget for coastal restoration.

You can easily send them an email message at audubonaction.org/louisiana or reach them by phone at 202-224-3121.

Now is the time to speak out for this globally important landscape and the people, birds and wildlife that depend on it!

■ One River, Two Courses



Mouth of the Mississippi River, 1937



In 2000, showing land lost



Growing deltas of the Atchafalaya River

Coastal Louisiana has lost 2,000 square miles of land since the 1930s as wetlands that are no longer replenished by fresh water and sediment from the Mississippi River subside and erode. Above, the left and center images show land lost near the mouth of the Mississippi below New Orleans. The right image shows two deltas that are continuing to build where the Atchafalaya River, which captures a portion of the Mississippi River flow, empties into Atchafalaya Bay. More land can be built by allowing more Mississippi River water and sediment into the marshes instead of dumping it into the deep water of the Gulf. Sources: National Audubon Society and Louisiana State University.

Atchafalaya River Basin

The Atchafalaya River Basin is comparable in size to Florida's Everglades. It contains the largest remaining block of bottomland hardwood forest and river swamp in the entire Mississippi River watershed, and yet, this unparalleled natural resource is not managed in an ecologically sound way. Audubon is leading an intensive scientific analysis of the river system and is convening stakeholders throughout the region to forge a new vision for the Atchafalaya River system – which may even have a role to play in broader coastal restoration, including protecting Audubon's Rainey Sanctuary and neighboring lands. Audubon's Rainey Sanctuary and the lands that neighbor it preserve some of the best remaining marsh, but here too, the decline is rapidly accelerating.

Across the Coast

Audubon partners closely with a diverse coalition of other environmental organizations, major corporations, industry and interest groups, and government officials to shine a spotlight on Louisiana before a national audience. These efforts are yielding increased federal attention; we work to secure major federal investment and more careful oversight in this internationally important landscape.



Audubon has worked with its partners to develop a small, barge-mounted dredge to aid in the restoration of marshland on Rainey Sanctuary. The dredge provides mud from a bayou or canal to rebuild degraded marshes nearby. Photo courtesy of David Ringer.



Audubon is building on its long presence in coastal Louisiana to achieve a safe and sustainable Louisiana coast.

Please contact your Members of Congress and ask for full funding for coastal Louisiana restoration at audubonaction.org/louisiana

■ For more information, contact David Ringer, dringer@audubon.org.



The Prothonotary Warbler is one of the many species of Neotropical migrants that depend on healthy natural habitats in Louisiana. Photo courtesy of Bill Stripling.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER INITIATIVE

Audubon's Louisiana program is part of a comprehensive, system-level approach to the challenges and opportunities facing North America's greatest river system: the Mississippi.

Mismanagement of land and water resources throughout the Mississippi River watershed continues to cause environmental degradation in Louisiana – from insufficient sediment flow contributing to the collapse of wetlands to nutrient pollution that causes a huge annual 'dead zone' in the Gulf of Mexico.

Audubon's plan includes scientists, policy staff and our chapter network to achieve powerful results throughout the system and in Louisiana.

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