

# A Call for Action to Restore and Protect Louisiana's Coast

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*The tragic explosion of the Deepwater Horizon took the lives of 11 men and unleashed an uncontrolled torrent of oil and gas into the Gulf of Mexico that fundamentally threatens the survival of Louisiana's wetlands. Those wetlands underpin not only our way of life, but the viability of the entire Gulf Coast. If the wetlands do not survive, life along the Delta will become unsustainable. This is a call to action.*

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## **LOUISIANA'S COAST IS WASHING AWAY**

Louisiana's vast network of wetlands drain more than 40 percent of the continental United States. This unique ecosystem is a prolific habitat; more than 75 percent of the Gulf's fish and wildlife spawn here. Those same wetlands protect Louisiana's coastal communities from the hazards of the open sea – more than 2 million people call Louisiana's coast home.

Unfortunately, this critical habitat is now under dire threat. The human overhaul of the Mississippi River Valley interrupted the river's natural processes, resulting in the catastrophic erosion of Louisiana's coastline. To date, more than 2,000 square miles of wetlands have been converted into open water since 1900 – a landmass the size of Delaware. Worse, Louisiana loses a tract of land the size of a football field every 38 minutes, and scientists forecast the loss of another 500 square miles by 2050 unless action is taken. This constitutes one of America's most pronounced ecological disasters and an imminent threat to the life, property and environment of the Gulf Coast.

## **COASTAL WETLANDS PROTECT COMMUNITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE FROM STORMS**

Louisiana's wetlands help diminish the destructive force of hurricanes by reducing storm surge and absorbing wave energy. Scientists estimate that for every 2.4 square miles of wetlands, deadly storm surges are lowered by about one foot. A recent study shows if this erosion goes unchecked, the coast can expect increases in storm surge and wave height of greater than 12 feet. As a result, communities and infrastructure are increasingly vulnerable to violent Gulf storms.

## **THE OIL SPILL**

Under any scenario, the BP oil disaster would have been extremely damaging. However, the spill's impact is magnified because it is attacking an already fragile ecosystem. Decades of unchecked erosion leave wetlands susceptible to deep penetration from the oil slick. The oil destroys vegetation, allowing the natural wave processes of the Gulf to quickly churn the now-unmoored soil into open water.

## **WHAT WE CAN DO TO SAVE THE COAST**

Building on decades of scientific study, the State of Louisiana has formulated an ambitious plan to protect and restore this fragile coast. This plan presents a suite of projects and measures designed to reduce risk to economic assets, restore sustainability to the coastal ecosystem, maintain a diverse wildlife habitat, and sustain Louisiana's unique heritage and culture. Implementing this plan will take decades and cost tens of billions of dollars. But the cost of inaction is far higher.

## **A PORTION OF THE REVENUES FROM OFFSHORE DRILLING SHOULD BE DEDICATED TO CORRECTING THIS PROBLEM**

Offshore drilling has occurred off Louisiana's coast since 1933. Since that time, offshore oil and gas has generated over \$165 billion in revenue for the Federal treasury – the second largest source of Federal revenue after income taxes. This revenue bypasses Gulf states and goes directly to the Federal Treasury, even as the Gulf's environment is severely impacted by energy development. Contrast this with states that host onshore energy production – and receive 50 percent of the revenues as compensation for the impacts. Immediately dedicating a portion of offshore oil and gas revenues to impacted states is the key to restoring our coast and protecting the Gulf Coast from further devastation.