

# Coastal Crisis Through the Lens of Community

Collaborators: UL Lafayette Department of History, Kathleen Blanco Public Policy Center, Restore the Mississippi River Delta Coalition, and the Louisiana Coastal Community Members

Project Members: Students in the Coast in Crisis Course under Dr. Liz Skilton and Dr. Anna Osland

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As part of an upper-level history course, students from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette harvested oral histories from coastal community members to gather their insights about the impacts of coastal restoration. Participants offered accounts of their experiences with erosion and restoration, an element often overlooked by the Coastal Master Plan. We visited coastal restoration sites with community members and coastal experts at the following locations to interview people about their understanding of restoration projects in existence for 5 or more years. Between January and March 2023, we traveled across the Louisiana Coast: **Pontchartrain Biloxi Marsh** and **Lake Lery**, **Mardi Gras Pass Project**, **Wax Lake**, **Sabine Refuge**, **Superior Canal**, and **Vermillion Bay**. Below are the details of what we found at each site, and our recommendations for ways to better involve communities in restoration projects in the future.

**Community members provided input, and we selected certain quotes at three restoration sites. The quotes are representative of larger themes that we noticed across all sites.**

## Mississippi Delta & Barataria Basin Project (Feb. 10)

The Mardi Gras Pass Project has been active for 10+ years and uses sediment deposition as its main force of combating the coastal crisis and building up land in certain areas.



## Pontchartrain Basin Biloxi Marsh and South Lery Shoreline Protection Project (Feb. 3)

The Pontchartrain Biloxi Marsh project is a shoreline protection project, while Lake Lery is engaging in marsh creation

*"I don't think that the average Louisianian that lives on the coasts is super aware of the amount of projects going on, the cost of those projects, how successful they are."* [Community Member interviewed on Site]

## Mermentau Basin Project (Mar. 3)

The project aims to stop the shoreline of Superior Canal up to Tebo Point on Grand lake from eroding via a rock barrier.

*"It's important to preserve the coastline and the things like visiting this kind of site in person helps you to understand and learn about what's happening along the coast in Louisiana in terms of land loss and restoration work."* [Community Member interviewed on Site]



## Atchafalaya Basin Project (Feb. 17)

As the Atchafalaya River continues to deposit soil in its basin, CPRA monitors the land development. The site is a long, straight canal that ends in a series of medium-sized, flat islands.



## Teche-Vermillion Basin Project (Mar. 10)

Creation of 365 acres and nourishment of 53 acres of brackish marsh using sediment from Vermilion Bay

*"If we don't do this, then, South Louisiana is just going to go away. I mean, we're already fighting an uphill battle."*

[Community Member interviewed on Site]



## Calcasieu-Sabine Basin Marsh Creation Project (Feb. 24)

A marsh creation site located on the Sabine Refuge and uses dredge materials. The purpose is to recreate marshland that subsided from saltwater intrusion.

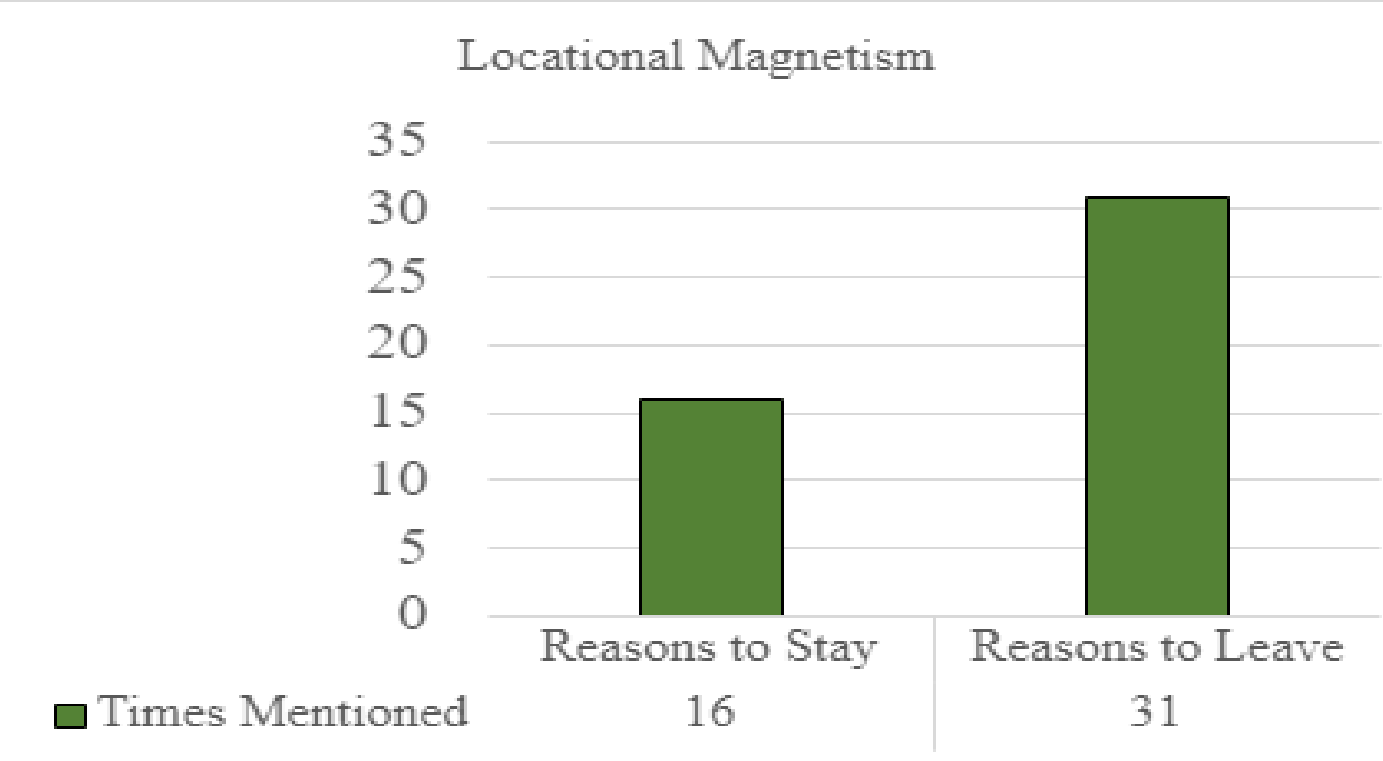


Fig. 1: This graph accounts for the communities' attitudes towards continued inhabitation on the coast. In it, the rationales to leave heavily outweigh those to stay, emphasizing the continued difficulties faced by residents of the region

## Themes Noted in Interviews:

- Enthusiasm**- Coastal communities have emotional and impassioned responses to coastal land loss because of their cultural and personal connections to this environment.
- Hurricanes as Benchmarks**- People base their timeline of coastal erosion dependent upon their experiences with storms.
- Where the Projects Are**- Most projects are geographically isolated from the communities they benefit.
- People**- Lived experiences are people's primary source of information on the topic of coastal restoration and erosion instead of formal education

## Takeaways From the Research:

- The **enthusiasm** coastal communities display for their culture and lifestyle tied to the coast is an **untapped resource**.
- Despite this, **organizations often fail to communicate with the communities these projects effect**, leaving those on the coast to base their knowledge of coastal change around their own personal experiences which are usually limited to major events like storms.
- Participants directly expressed the desire for better education about coastal restoration projects**, whether the project is newly constructed or in existence for several years, and recommended bringing community members to these sites for this education.

## Recommendations Based on Our Findings

We recommend **fostering the cultural connections that communities maintain with coastal environments, applying it to restoration projects, and encouraging direct civic engagement with restoration sites.**

This requires **organizations** involved in restoration efforts **to develop deeper relationships and open dialogue** with the **communities they serve, expanding community perception beyond disaster recovery.**

Ultimately, **coastal communities want to be involved with restoration sites** to understand the role these **efforts play in the coastal ecosystem and better incorporate restoration organizations into the ebb and flow of coastal life.**

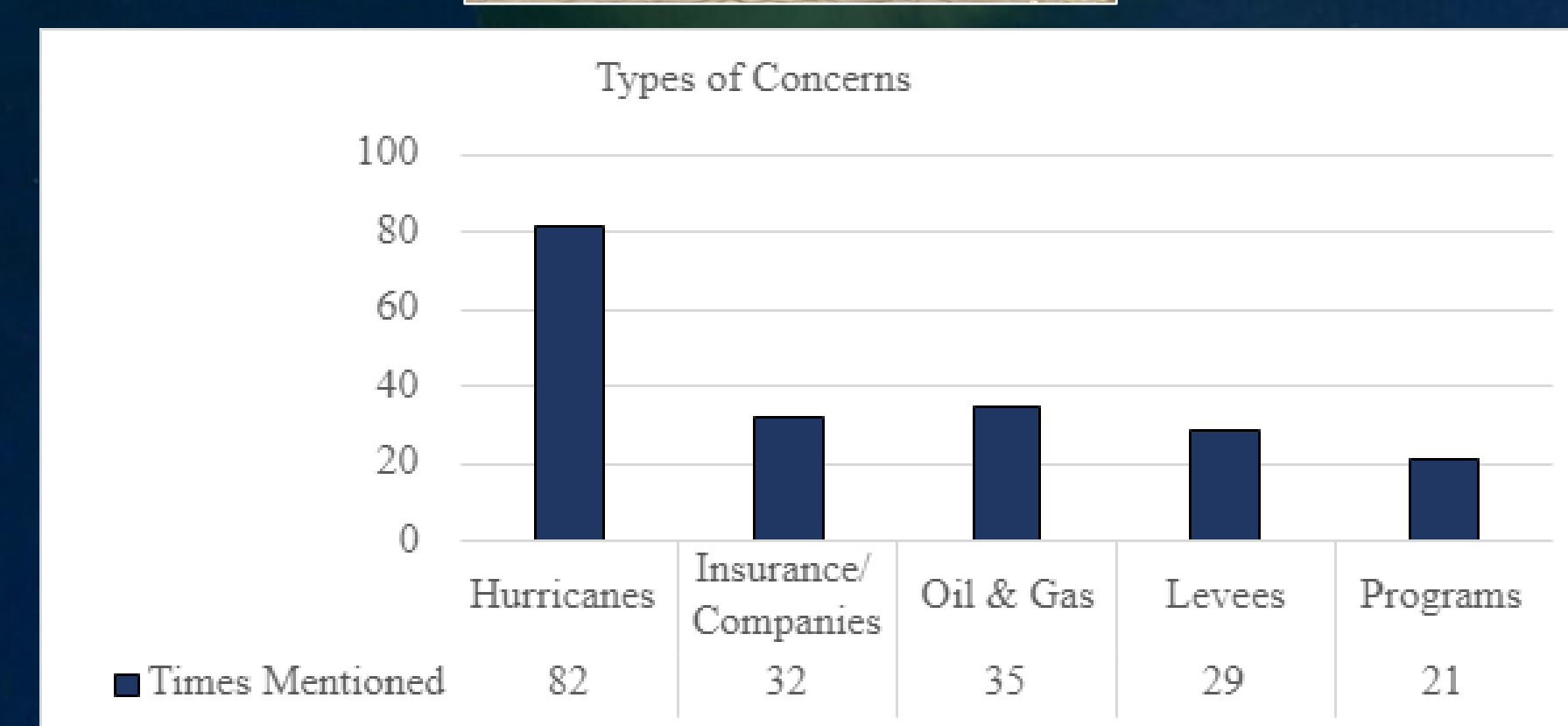


Fig. 2: This graph lists concerns from community members. Said concerns compound the coastal crisis in communities' eyes.

## References:

UL Lafayette Coastal Restoration History Harvest Interviews, collected January-March 2023 at various sites.