

Ensuring Consistency Between Environmental Restoration and Development

In coastal Louisiana we are trying to find the balance between economic development and coastal restoration and protection. We must address both our economic and environmental needs, which are inextricably linked and yet often in conflict. This is a challenge facing restoration efforts across the country, from California to the Chesapeake Bay and the Everglades. But this challenge is perhaps greatest in coastal Louisiana for the simple fact that we live and work in and among the same wetlands we rely on and need to protect. How we confront this challenge will not only be critical for our future, but it may also serve as an example for other restoration efforts around the country.

Development activities - from navigation improvements and hurricane protection to residential and commercial construction - can harm the coastal environment. Yet, such activities are critical for a vital economy in coastal Louisiana and beyond. As we embrace the need for coastal restoration in Louisiana, we must also ensure that needed economic development does not undermine the wetlands and coastal ecosystems that are intrinsic to long-term economic vitality. A moratorium on growth in the coastal zone is not the solution, nor is "business as usual." We must be able to address critical societal needs such as hurricane protection, navigation, and economic development in a way that is, at a minimum, consistent with coastal restoration and protection efforts. Moreover, while consistency should be sought in every instance, it may be possible in some cases to go even further by devising ways to make such activities complement each other.

Ensuring such consistency will require greater integration of planning processes, improved science tools, and a greater understanding in general of the interactions between coastal restoration and development. We will need to be more knowledgeable about the cumulative effects of various activities throughout the coastal landscape, and we will need to more fully appreciate the socio-economic considerations relating to development and restoration decisions. We will need to involve more and a greater array of stakeholders. We will also need to improve our ability to forecast future environmental conditions. In short, our decision processes will need to be more complex, inclusive, and informed. Getting to that point will require the combined efforts of researchers, government officials, nonprofit organizations, educators, community leaders, landowners, businesses, and other important stakeholder groups.