

Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries
2006-07 Hurricane Recovery Projects/Accomplishments
****Updated July 2007**

ENFORCEMENT DIVISION -----

ESF – 9 Enhancement 2006-07: In preparation for future disaster recovery scenarios, and as the lead agency in Emergency Support Function 9 for search and rescue (SAR), Enforcement has worked with GOHSEP, the Louisiana National Guard, U. S. Coast Guard, Department of Defense FEMA, New Orleans Police, Fire and Emergency Medical Services as well as other supporting state agencies to develop a unified response effort. Additionally, LDWF’s new response plan establishes a command center at LDWF’s Quail Drive annex building. SAR personnel will work in coordination for waterborne and airborne rescue. LDWF will again staff a forward command post in the recovery area, to be determined by storm landfall and high ground availability. This effort will fall under the newly-created “Louisiana Interagency ‘All Hazards’ Emergency Response Plan ESF- 9 Standard Operating Procedure (SOP).” This plan includes provisions for coordinating activities among all responding local, state and federal agencies.

Other Joint planning and training exercises have been conducted with the Dept. of Agriculture, DHH, La. National Guard, State Police, DSS and DOTD. LDWF has trained personnel within Sheriff’s Offices in coastal parishes, National Guard units and New Orleans Fire and Police units in Boating Safety and Waterborne SAR.

Mobile Command Unit: LDWF Enforcement, with funding provided by NOAA Marine Fisheries as part of a Joint Enforcement Agreement, acquired in FY 2006-07 a new 40-foot mobile command unit designed to provide weather-secured work space for personnel working in a forward command environment for disaster recovery missions. The unit is equipped with state-of-the-art communications equipment and will be deployed for search and rescue missions, boating safety special events, as well as recruiting and educational events around the state.

CONTACT: Lt. Col. Keith LaCaze
Enforcement Division
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
Office: 225-765-2985
e-mail: klacaze@wlf.louisiana.gov

FUR AND REFUGE DIVISION-----

HABITAT SECTION (Aug. 2006 – July 2007)

Natural & Scenic Rivers Program:

Scenic Rivers program staff issued 22 emergency Scenic River Permits for watershed clean up activities in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Staff has continued to work closely with affected coastal parishes and federal regulatory agencies to monitor and inspect those clean up activities undertaken on and adjacent to designated Scenic Streams. This has included pre- and post-activity site inspections, responding to questions/complaints from the public, assisting in the training of personnel conducting the actual work and participating in restoration planning when warranted.

Nongame Program:

Nongame program staff, with funding from USFWS, began the first year of a 3 year grant to conduct plover surveys for the entire Louisiana Coast. Staff hopes to gauge the response of two plover species, the piping and snowy plover, to the after effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. A second segment of these grant monies include funding the first of three years of red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) demographic monitoring and habitat improvements at SE Louisiana Hospital in St. Tammany Parish. These monies will fund color banding of the federally endangered RCW as well as herbaceous and woody vegetation control in the RCW foraging habitat surrounding the hospital grounds.

Statewide Ecological Investigations:

Staff continues to participate in the planning of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' hurricane protection projects. Staff provides technical assistance to planners and sponsors with the goal of minimizing and/or mitigating adverse project impacts to Louisiana's fish and wildlife resources.

Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator:

In May, 2007, the LDWF State Wildlife Grants Committee approved funding for a project entitled, "Avian Monitoring & Swainson's Warbler Nesting Study in the Pearl River Basin." This project will, in part, evaluate the impacts of Hurricane Katrina on nesting habitat for the Swainson's Warbler, a species of conservation concern in Louisiana.

CONTACT: Kyle F. Balkum
Biologist Program Manager, Habitat Section
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
Office: 225-765-2819
e-mail: kbalkum@wlf.louisiana.gov

MARINE FISHERIES DIVISION -----

Louisiana Shrimp Industry Disaster Assistance (2004): LDWF Marine Fisheries administered the distribution of \$7.17 million in economic assistance payments to qualified resident and nonresident shrimp fishermen under National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/U.S. Department of Commerce Award No. NA03NMF4520310. The Louisiana shrimp industry has been severely impacted by depressed economic conditions brought about by increasing global competition and importation of shrimp and shrimp products into the US. Funding from the award has also been used to enhance marketing and promotional efforts of wild caught Louisiana shrimp. Since the hurricanes of 2005, LDWF has been conducting surveys of shrimp dealers to ascertain impacts of the storms on their businesses and marketing and promotional efforts.

Hurricane Katrina and Rita Fisheries Restoration: LDWF was awarded three grants in September 2006 totaling nearly \$53 million from a congressional supplemental appropriation to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service. The grants, through the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, provide for restoring Louisiana fisheries damaged by the catastrophic hurricanes of 2005. Grant objectives are (1) reseedling, rehabilitating and restoring public and private oyster reefs through debris removal, cultch planting, water quality monitoring, reef surveys, and oyster stock improvement; (2) rehabilitating oyster bed and shrimp grounds through underwater obstruction and wet debris removal, and habitat enhancement and monitoring; and (3) conducting cooperative research with the commercial and recreational marine fishing industries to collect the data needed to monitor the recovery of Gulf fisheries.

Under grant (1), two public oyster reefs, Black Bay in Plaquemines Parish (completed in May 2007) and Mississippi Sound in St. Bernard Parish (completed in June 2007), were selected for restoration work. Approximately 200 acres in each area were rehabilitated by placing cultch material (limestone, crushed concrete, oyster shell, etc.) on the reefs to provide suitable substrate for larval oyster attachment. Approximately \$10 million is currently programmed for oyster rehabilitation in the public oyster areas, and additional projects will be conducted on various public oyster areas throughout the Louisiana coast.

Approximately \$12 million is being used to assist with rehabilitation work on private oyster leases under the Private Oyster Lease Rehabilitation (POLR) program. Under this program oyster leaseholders have been given the opportunity to enter into cooperative endeavor agreements with the state to conduct a variety of approved rehabilitation activities on the waterbottoms they lease. Upon receipt of documentation of rehabilitation work, LDWF is reimbursing the leaseholder for a portion of their expenses up to a pre-determined maximum amount.

Additionally, LDWF has worked with the Department of Health and Hospitals to restore seafood testing laboratory capability that was lost as a result of the storms of 2005. LDWF has entered into agreement with DHH to aid them in replacing laboratory equipment and boats needed for seafood certification.

Grant (2) activities to-date include issuing a request for proposal and subsequent contract award for cleaning storm-related debris from the traditional fishing grounds of coastal Louisiana. LDWF also has worked with the Department of Natural Resources to provide additional funds to their existing Underwater Obstruction removal program as an additional means to bolster removal of storm-related debris and thereby provide a safer environment for fishers and boaters.

Activities under grant (3) are under development, with the goal of collecting information from commercial and recreational fishery participants to monitor and track the recovery of Louisiana's coastal fisheries.

Office of Fisheries staff have also begun planning in anticipation of additional funding appropriated by Congress to aid in Gulf Coast fisheries hurricane recovery.

Post-Hurricane Operations and Biological Sampling: Despite reduced personnel and equipment availability following hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Marine Fisheries Division staff responded to losses of field facilities, offices and equipment, and organized to re-establish operational and sampling programs coastwide. They continue to perform crucial biological sampling in all major coastal bay systems and on the public oyster grounds to delineate hurricane-related impacts to coastal fishery resources as well as documenting hurricane impacts to commercial and recreational fishing infrastructure. The data gathered during the weeks following Hurricane Katrina were instrumental in documenting hurricane damages and were used as a basis for requests to Congress for fisheries disaster relief funding to restore Louisiana fishery resources.

Artificial Reef Program – Hurricane Katrina/Rita Reef Additions: In FY 2006/2007 LDWF continued to convert obsolete platforms and those toppled or damaged beyond repair by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita August/September 2005 into artificial reefs per the Louisiana Fishing Enhancement Act which created Louisiana's Artificial Reef Program. The Department is in the permitting process for others that fit the program needs. After plugging and abandoning the wells and cleaning the platforms of any hydrocarbons and hazardous materials the platforms were accepted by the state into the Program. In addition to the platforms the participating companies also donate 50% of the savings realized by converting their platforms into artificial reefs over the traditional onshore abandonment to the Artificial Reef Trust Fund for use in the program.

Abandoned Crab Trap Removal: The LDWF has continued to administer the abandoned crab trap removal program. The 2007 efforts of staff and volunteers recovered 1,498 abandoned traps from the Lake Pontchartrain Estuary and Barataria Bay over a two week period in February and March.

Marine Fisheries Laboratory: In spite of delays caused by the effects of Hurricane Katrina on Grand Isle, site preparation work for the new Marine Fisheries Investigations Facility has begun. This part of the work to replace the hurricane-damaged facility on Grand Terre was completed by summer of 2007 and includes site clearing and leveling,

bay access and marina dredging, and all bulk heading. The facility construction was bid and a contract awarded for construction. Work has begun and estimated completion for this phase is late 2008. The new facility will contain laboratory and office space for Department and other researchers as well as conference and overnight facilities. It will attract coastal and fisheries researchers and cooperators, and provide better access for the public to Department activities and services.

Assessing Oyster Ground Hurricane Damage and Employ Fishermen: Marine Fisheries' Division staff worked with NOAA Fisheries to re-program \$1.2 million in Hurricane Lili grant funding to use licensed commercial oyster harvesters in St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes to map the public oyster seed grounds in those parishes. The mapping information will be a valuable asset to future oyster management activities on the public oyster grounds, helping identify suitable areas for the development of new oyster reefs in the aftermath of Katrina and Rita. The local parish government hired the fishermen who participated in the project (\$600,000 per parish). Project fieldwork was completed in January and February 2006; data management activities continue.

CONTACT: Jim Hanifen
Assistant Division Administrator, Marine Fisheries Division
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
Office: 225-765-2383
e-mail: jhanifen@wlf.louisiana.gov