

To friends of the Orleans Wetlands Communities

In early August, we reported that our community efforts to focus attention on the problems of marine debris in the fishing grounds and waterways of Eastern New Orleans was a great success. You will recall that we had all learned from news articles in June that FEMA and the USCG were nearly finished with a fantastic job of cleaning up the beaches, bays, bayous and canals of AL and MS. When we asked what the timetable was for us, we were informed that there were no plans for cleaning up the far more extensive debris littering the coast of LA.

At that point, we mobilized to support the efforts of the Louisiana Recovery Authority for equal treatment for LA. We organized the Pontchartrain Estuary Task Force with widespread community involvement, including the Mayor's office, the City Council, universities and coastal advocacy organizations. Then, on July 30th, we presented the LRA with a PowerPoint presentation illustrating the community impact of Katrina litter on our fishing grounds, as well as a map of 250 reports of submerged debris reported by commercial and recreational fishers. In response, the LRA gave us a hearty round of applause and issued a unanimous resolution to request that FEMA and the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP) collaborate to get the waterways of LA cleaned up as well as those of AL and MS.

Soon after, the LA Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries let a contract to clean up about 40 sq miles of Lake Catherine and the Pontchartrain Middle Grounds. Technically speaking, it's not FEMA funding, but it came from the same Congressional bank account. We were very fortunate that LDWF decided to utilize the funds for our area. The money was earmarked for fisheries habitat restoration in State owned water bottoms. (We've all been disappointed that the Venetian Isles, Irish Bayou and Ft. Pike Canals didn't qualify under that particular program, but we'll try to find another way through FEMA).

I'm happy to say that, in response to the LRA's request, FEMA has agreed to bring in the Coast Guard to organize LA's coastal cleanup. That's HUGE! The LA Dept. of Natural Resources will act as the state's official "applicant" agency. GOHSEP, which is responsible for all of the State's negotiations with FEMA, has asked me to represent Louisiana as its liaison in the process. How could I refuse? I only have to stay on until the job is done, although no one knows how long that will be.

I'm proud to say that, as of November 1st, I have accepted Louisiana's invitation and will do my best to advocate for the cleanup of the shorelines, canals, bayous and wetlands of all 23 coastal Parishes. This will be my first experience as a government employee and I'm looking forward to the challenges of the project.

Of course, for a while, that will mean that I will not spend as much time as I would like beating a drum for the Orleans Wetlands Communities and the Land Bridge; however, I will do whatever I can as time permits. Over the last two years, together we have obtained about \$63 million in local, State and federal commitments for 17

miles of shoreline protection and marsh restoration along the north shore of Lake Borgne, over \$1 million in debris removal, \$400,000 in vehicle and boat removal, more than \$1.3 million in submerged debris removal and \$130,000 in overtime policing. Recently, the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration (NOAA) decided to make our area its first priority in remapping the coast. In addition, the Orleans Land Bridge area looms larger on the radar screen than ever before. Not a bad score.....but, there's lots more to do to protect the precious wetlands, shorelines and people of the Pontchartrain Estuary. I'm confident that the Orleans Wetlands Communities will continue to be up to the task.

As always, feel free to let me know of your concerns and I will do what I can to address them.

Best regards to all,

Lee Richardson  
Board Member / Executive Director  
Lake Catherine Civic Association  
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