



Louisiana moving forward with hurricane protection on the West Bank

By Paul Purpura, The Times-Picayune
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Susan Poag/The Times-Picayune

The 23rd annual Governor's West Bank Luncheon at the Alario Center near Westwego drew about 900 people.

Louisiana is forging ahead with hurricane protection and coastal restoration projects that, if carried to fruition, will slow the rate of land loss not seen since the 1930s, Gov. Bobby Jindal told the West Bank business community Wednesday.

"And we'll will have the highest percentage of our people living and working behind hurricane protection projects than ever before," he told the crowd of 900 during the 23rd annual Governor's West Bank Luncheon at the Alario Center near Westwego.

Louisiana has lost 2,300 square miles to coastal erosion, he said. Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav and Ike caused the loss of 340 miles of coastline.

He touted several projects, including a nearly \$30 million state investment that, with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, is using sediment dredged from the Mississippi River and pumped through pipes the state supplies to build nearly 500 acres of marsh in lower Plaquemines and Jefferson parishes.



Susan Poag/The Times-Picayune

Gov. Bobby Jindal talks with real estate developer Joseph Canizaro, right, after the Governor's West Bank Luncheon.

"In October, that area of Plaquemines and Jefferson parishes was open water," Jindal said. "Last week, it was river sediment hard enough you could drive a truck over it. In a year, it's going to be a functioning wetland once again."

The marsh-restoration project as designed could reduce the storm surge by as much as five feet, said Plaquemines Parish President Billy Nungesser, who applauded Jindal's remarks.

"It makes no sense to pay to dredge the sediment and then dump it out in the Gulf where it does no good instead of using it to rebuild our own wetlands," Jindal said.

He also said the Barataria Land Bridge near Lafitte, the largest wetlands restoration project in state history and intended as a 2,000-acre buffer between salt and freshwater, is near completion.

Jindal bemoaned federal projects that have been approved for decades but never begun. During the past 2 1/2 years, the state has committed \$1.7 billion to hurricane protection and coastal restoration projects, 10 times what the state spent three years ago, he said.

"The bottom line is this: We're not waiting on Washington D.C. for more studies," Jindal said.

"We're going to go ahead and get these projects done. We're doing 1,500 percent more work in coastal Louisiana than we were doing three years ago, and we're not going to let up.

"We continue to lose our wetlands and our barrier islands, so we have got to continue as a state to be as aggressive as possible," he said. "I want to emphasize this. We are not waiting. We need our federal government to be our partners in this. Don't get me wrong. But we cannot wait for them to do more studies."

He said the nation needs to invest in Louisiana's coast, although his fellow governors and former colleagues in Washington D.C. are on board to protect what they see is a region through which 30 percent of the nation's oil and gas flows.

Louisiana gets "virtually nothing" in the form of royalties the petroleum industry garners from off the state's coast, unlike other states.

"Yes, we need levees," Jindal said. "We can't build the great wall of Louisiana alone to protect us from these storms. We need comprehensive coastal restoration as well."