

Students restoring Louisiana's wetlands

The fact that middle and high school students care about Louisiana's wetlands can be seen on May 10, when about 20 students from Pierre Part Middle School give up their after-school free time to plant baldcypress seedlings at the Belle River Boat Landing near Pierre Part. This May Day project is part of Coastal Roots, an ongoing program involving students in 15 south Louisiana schools designed to teach students about wetland restoration. Louisiana is losing 30 square miles of land per year, and, without some action, is projected to lose about 1,000 square miles by 2050.

Over the past two years, science classes in the schools in eleven different parishes have gathered seeds of native plants such as waxmyrtle, baldcypress, and black mangrove, and nurtured the resulting seedlings in school to planting size. Students then planted them in declining wetlands, helping to restore some of the most valuable land and habitat in the state. Although students normally plant in the late fall, these Pierre Part Middle School students decided to conduct this special planting to emphasize their concern for the state's wetlands. Their effort to restore the state's wetlands

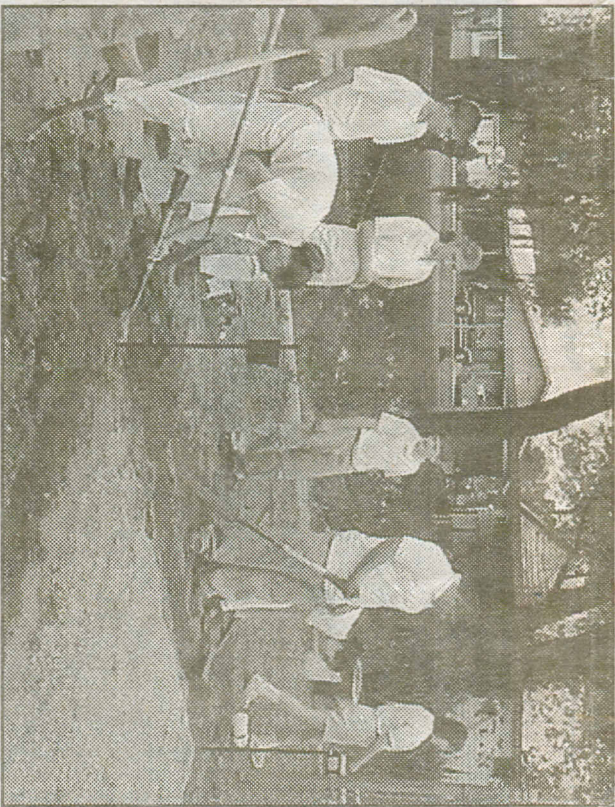


photo provided by LSU Sea Grant

Pierre Part Middle School recently put in a can yard for Bald Cypress seedlings that students will soon "bump-up" to larger containers. The project is tied into Coastal Restoration projects and is sponsored by LSU. On May 10 the students will travel to the Belle River Landing to plant Bald Cypress seedlings in conjunction with Governor Foster's Mayday.

through the Coastal Roots Program, like student efforts in Assumption, Calcasieu, Cameron, East Baton Rouge, Jefferson, Lafourche, Point Coupe, St. Charles, Terrebonne, Vermilion, and West Baton Rouge parishes, is ongoing. "These students are learning at a young age the importance of

restoring and maintaining a healthy ecosystem," said John Giambone, Pierre Part Middle School science teacher. "They are restoring what generations before, unknowingly, improperly used."

May is wetlands month in Louisiana, and Gov. Foster has designated May 10-11 as "Take Back the Coast" days, providing a statewide opportunity for citizens, schools, businesses, and clubs to take the time to care for the state's wetland resources. This May Day planting is a cooperative effort of the sponsors of the Coastal Roots Program - Louisiana Sea Grant College Program, the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, and the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana - and the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, and the Atchafalaya Basin Project.

"It is so encouraging to see students interested in forestry, coastal restoration and the environment. These are big issues that will remain important in society as the students get older," Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry Bob Odom said. "If we can nurture their interests in coastal restoration topics now, these students might become the researchers that improve the processes that we use in the future."