

Coastal Roots Program aims to restore wetlands

Students participate in seedling planting

By Mallory Logan

Contributing Writer

The Louisiana coastline could advance inland as much as 35 miles by 2040 if erosion doesn't slow, according to a national survey.

This would plunge some southern Louisiana communities into the Gulf of Mexico.

The state holds about 40 percent of the nation's wetlands and currently loses 35 square miles a year, according to the United States Geological Survey National Wetlands Research Center.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration awarded the College of Education's Coastal Roots Program and its partners a Bay-Watershed Education and Training Grant in 2008 to encourage action to prevent the state's eroding coastline.

"Right now we are approaching the end of planting season, and 1,156 students have gone on planting trips to plant 11,816 trees and grass plugs," said Pamela Blanchard, director of the LSU Coastal Roots Program and assistant professor in the College of Education.

Coastal Roots encourages elementary and high school students across the state to learn about the importance of the wetlands while participating in restoration projects.

"When these kids reach voting age, I would like them to have formed their own beliefs and decide if the local environment is worth their tax money," Blanchard said.

Participating students grow restoration seedlings at school and plant them once a year at restoration sites chosen by the University's program.

"Teachers are very busy people and don't have time to figure out where they can get permission to plant, so we facilitate that for them," Blanchard said.

Fountainebleau State Park and Jean Lafitte State Park are two sites where students are commonly sent. Both parks still face destruction from Hurricane Katrina.

The \$300,000 grant is to be given through a three-year period, allowing the program to expand to include Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium's Bayou Side Classroom and Mississippi State University's Coastal Research and Extension Center in Biloxi, Mississippi.

LUMCON's Bayou Side Classroom is a teaching program designed to train students to collect scientific data while promoting awareness of the local environment.

LUMCON members include public and private colleges around the state including Tulane University, Nicholls State University, Grambling University and the University of New Orleans.

The partnership between the programs has created new opportunities for teachers on both sides.

"Teachers in our program that have wanted to participate in Bayou Side Classroom are now invited to be part of that program and vice versa," Blanchard said.

Next week, students will be planting at Avery Island, where the Tabasco hot sauce plant is located. Pepper fields are being replaced with cypress environments to support the large black bear population residing there.

Students will continue to plant around the state until planting season concludes at the end of this month.

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ENVIRONMENT



photo courtesy of PAMELA BLANCHARD

Two students from R.K Smith middle school participate in the restoration planting at Bayou Segnette State Park. Planting season concludes at the end of this month.

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