

Louisiana Wildlife Federation

July - December
2023



LOUISIANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

Winter 2023

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Since 1940, Louisiana Wildlife Federation has been the voice for Louisiana's wildlife and natural resources. Join us to protect Sportsman's Paradise for future generations.

Principles:

- Conserve Louisiana's natural resources with emphasis on wildlife and their habitat
- Advance sound, scientifically established resource management principles
- Engage outdoor enthusiasts through education and advocacy

This newsletter is printed biannually for members and supporters. Updates on LWF activities and events can be found on our website and social media pages:

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Cover Photo: Newly hatched Kemp's ridley sea turtle on Louisiana's Chandeleur Islands. Credit: Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority.

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LWF is an affiliate organization of National Wildlife Federation and together we form a powerful network for wildlife conservation locally and nationally.



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Pontchartrain Conservancy
Rapides Wildlife Association
Shreveport Society for Nature Study - Bird Study Group
Toledo Bend Lake Association
Woodlands Conservancy

MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

As we turned upstream, I saw a white whale ahead and all of the fascination and fear and awe it sparked in me is as strong today as it was 53 years ago. It wasn't actually Moby Dick, and we weren't in the great southern ocean, but my dad and my parrain had taken me fishing in a boat on the Calcasieu River and that ominous thing on the horizon was a sandbar glowing white on a foggy spring morning.



I caught my first fish, a catfish, that day and have encountered many more fish and sandbars since then. Those men, along with my grandfather and uncles and my mom immersed me in the outdoors through hunting, fishing, hiking, and birding. Those early experiences in the forests and fields, on the rivers and lakes gave me more confidence as each adult shared his or her unique relationships with the natural world.

My dad taught me how to fish, how to use a boat safely, and to keep the water clean. My grandfather was a sac-a-lait master in the Basin and revealed how the looming gray stumps in the Atchafalaya were once great trees and how the smallish conical cypress we saw would lose their tops after storms and flatten out and live for centuries. He taught me how to safely use a shotgun and lent me one. His daughter taught me the call of the female and male bobwhite quail. Where he had hunted them, she became a keen observer of such birds and other wild things. I am still grateful for the wisdom and passion they shared with me.

LWF values all of the ways that the conservation ethic and nature lore move from one generation to the next. The Youth Hunter of the Year awards and Conservation Achievement Awards recognize an array of people along the continuum of experiencing and caring for wildlife and the places they inhabit. If you aren't a member yet, sign up and share your own unique relationship with the natural world. We will all benefit. ■ - Zac Burson

NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

"LWF has never really played politics. LWF does not exist to advance a political party's agenda but to influence those managing the natural resources belonging to the citizens of this state."

That's what I said in December at the beginning of LWF's day-long retreat to update our strategic plan for the next four years. LWF members care about wildlife and the habitat they depend on to be sustainable. Issues grabbing our attention lately are wind and solar energy production, reducing carbon emissions through carbon sequestration, and how all this impacts habitat quality, public lands, and wildlife migration.



A past board member reminded me the Louisiana Constitution states the "natural resources of the state, including air and water, and the healthful, scenic, historic, and aesthetic quality of the environment" are to "be protected, conserved, and replenished" and mandates the legislature to "enact laws to implement this policy." This establishes environmental preservation and conservation of natural resources as the public policy of the state.

LWF represents our membership in advancing that policy work. Thank you for your support. It's vitally important for wildlife in Louisiana. ■ - Rebecca Triche



MAJOR RIVER DIVERSION PROJECT OFFICIALLY BREAKS GROUND

by Stacy Ortego, Coastal Policy Manager

On August 10, 2023, hundreds of people gathered in Belle Chasse, La to celebrate the groundbreaking of the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion – the largest single ecosystem restoration project in U.S. history. After decades of discussions, studies and planning, dirt is finally moving to allow the Mississippi River to do what it's done for millennia: deposit sediment and nutrients to surrounding wetlands and build land.

Large-scale projects like this are needed to meet the challenges we face along coastal Louisiana. When the levees were built to contain the river nearly 100 years ago after the Great Flood of 1927, it was known that there would be consequences to the ecosystem. Over 2,000 square miles of land has been lost since 1932. Barataria Basin alone has lost over 400 square miles in that time.

After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) was established to lead coastal protection and restoration efforts using the latest science and engineering to save wetlands and protect people. The Coastal Master Plan is the guiding document of projects to help meet this charge. The Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion has long been a cornerstone of that plan to divert sediment, freshwater, and nutrients to the basin – sediment that would otherwise be lost to the Gulf of Mexico.

The \$3 billion project will create land, restoring critical wildlife habitat and protecting coastal communities in Jefferson, Orleans, and portions of Plaquemines Parishes from the worst effects of storms by providing a buffer for storm surge and reducing wave impacts.

The project is funded with money from the Deepwater Horizon disaster. Barataria Basin received the heaviest oiling from the spill, which doubled (or even tripled) the rate of land loss in the basin. Barataria Basin is experiencing some of the highest rates of land loss in the world. Soon, the river will once again flow over the wetlands, helping offset subsidence with fresh layers of sediment and depositing freshwater and nutrients needed for a thriving ecosystem.



The diversion has the potential to build and sustain an estimated 13,000 to 26,000 acres (about 20 to 40 square miles) of wetlands, depending on future sea level rise. A healthy and sustainable estuarine system supports habitat for a wide variety of seafood, fish, and other aquatic life – all of which would be lost without the project.

The project will complete construction by late 2027/early 2028. Adaptive management for such a bold project will be critical. LWF will continue celebrating the wins along the way – especially the day the diversion is officially operational – and we will also monitor project updates after operation begins to ensure the responsible management of the project to deliver the best benefits for people and wildlife.

Our Sportsman's Paradise needs healthy estuaries. While Mother Nature can take away, she can also deliver. Once the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion is operational, we will finally re-establish the land-building power of the Mighty Mississippi to the land. That's definitely something worth celebrating. ■

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84TH ANNUAL CONVENTION HELD AUGUST 19, 2023

General Assembly Packed with Information, Discussion, and Celebration

Our 84th Annual Convention and General Assembly was held at the historic Hotel Bentley in Alexandria, LA August 18-19. The convention began with a meeting of LWF's Board of Directors on Friday, followed by a evening social, where local supporters were able to engage in informal discussions with board members, staff, and affiliate organizations.



More than 60 board members, affiliate representatives, members, and guests convened Saturday for the 2023 General Assembly. Along with swearing in this year's slate of officers and executive committee members, staff and board members led policy discussions on wind energy, carbon sequestration, and a "Lights Out for Migratory Birds" initiative. NWF board member, Allyn Dukes and NWF staff member, GERALYN HOEY, also provided updates from the National Wildlife Federation. You can learn more about these topics and LWF's position at [Lawildlifefed.org/resolutions](https://lawildlifefed.org/resolutions).



The highlight of the General Assembly was the presentation of the President's Cup to Charles Williams for his tireless efforts to conserve Louisiana wildlife and habitats. This is the third time Charles has been awarded the President's Cup over his 14 years of service to LWF. To celebrate and honor this incredible achievement, Charles was given a cup worthy of his accomplishment.

To cap off the two-day event, attendees were invited on an exclusive field trip to nearby Kisatchie National Forest to see first-hand the endangered species recovery efforts for red-cockaded woodpeckers and the Louisiana pine snake. ■





LWF RAISES CONCERNS TO WILDLIFE & FISHERIES OVER CATAHOULA LAKE

by Stacy Ortego, Coastal Policy Manager

In October 2023, LWF submitted a letter to the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and the Wildlife & Fisheries Commission highlighting concerns over Catahoula Lake.

Known for its world-class hunting opportunities that attract people from all over the country, Catahoula Lake (located in central Louisiana) is the largest freshwater lake in Louisiana. Water levels had been managed since the 1970s to benefit wildlife, including migratory game species and shorebirds. It was named a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance due to its excellent feeding and resting areas for waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds.

In 2020, the Louisiana Supreme Court upheld part of a lower court rule stating Catahoula Lake constitutes a basin that Little River seasonally floods and that the land along Little River is private land, which includes areas once considered public land. This created a need to affirm property boundaries and ownership. It also raises concerns about beneficial management of the basin area for wildlife and recreational use by the public.

Louisiana is at a major decision point regarding Catahoula Lake as the issue continues to evolve since the court decisions declaring the lakebed private property. LWF has heard our members' concerns about the possible loss or degradation of this important wetland and loss of public hunting opportunities

LWF recommended several actions/policies regarding maintenance of the habitat and management of what's left of the public hunting area, including the recreation of a conservation pool refuge, expanding the Dewey Wills WMA, controlling woody vegetation, conducting aerial surveys of waterfowl, and the reestablishment of "rest areas" (mini-refuges) in WMAs of northeast Louisiana in an attempt to retain more ducks in this heavily hunted region of the state.

The letter was submitted on behalf of the many LWF members who are veteran Louisiana duck hunters distressed by the current downtrend in waterfowl numbers and believe that our state's habitat management and hunting management policies must start with the reality of that trend characterized by fewer ducks coming here, those that do come arriving later, and heavy hunting pressure that needs to be better managed.

You can read the letter on our policy page at [**Lawildlifefed.org/policy-center**](https://lawildlifefed.org/policy-center). ■

MEMORIAL & HONORARY GIFTS (AUGUST – DECEMBER)

In Honor of Jennifer Leggett & Scott Fulton by Adelaide Williams

In Memory of Lenny James Meche by Tina Wilson Brown

In Memory of Lenny James Meche by Becky Fruge w/ Cox, Cox, Filo, Camel, Wilson, & Brown

In Memory of Sonny Margarejo by Neil Margarejo

In Memory of Lenny James Meche by Marty Babbington

In Memory of Mary Beth Peirce by Clay & Kristy Courville

In Honor of Ben Ortego by Grey Hammett

In Honor of Mary Hollingsworth Sherk by Richard Shimer

In Honor of Amy & Bryan Hester by Susan Dunbar

In Memory of Lenny James Meche by Richard & Susan Gerard

In Honor of Suzanne Rosser by Amber Pepin

In Honor of Brittany & Aaron Svoboda by Alex & Susan Kufeldt

In Honor of Maddie Tarter by Nancy Pourciau

In Honor of Dan & Lois Carter by Zac Crowell

In Honor of Alice Henderson & Carroll Grevemberg by Elizabeth Garvin ■

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Ways You Can Leave a Legacy Gift:

Gifts in your will: You can leave a gift to LWF by bequest in your will or trust. Bequests are one of the most popular options for creating a legacy because they are so flexible.

Gifts by IRA Distribution: If you qualify for mandatory IRA distributions, donations to a nonprofit organization can be beneficial. Name LWF as your recipient for tax-free distribution option.

Gifts by Beneficiary Designation: Many assets transfer by beneficiary designation form you completed when you established your account, rather than through your will or trust. To name LWF as a beneficiary, please use our legal name, Louisiana Wildlife Federation, Inc. and our federal tax identification number (72-0445638).

Contact Rebecca Triche
225-344-6707
rebecca@lawildlifefed.org



Please let us know if you have already included LWF in your estate plans. We want to thank you for your gift.



LWF AMONG 30 GROUPS URGING CORPS TO PRIORITIZE MRGO ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

by Stacy Ortego, Coastal Policy Manager

The MRGO Must Go Coalition – which Louisiana Wildlife Federation is part of – and other community organizations recently submitted a letter to Assistant Secretary of the Army Michael Connor urging the Corps to prioritize restoration along the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) federal shipping channel.

A key request in the letter is to dedicate funding for MRGO ecosystem restoration in the President's Fiscal Year 2025 Budget – the soonest funding could be appropriated since the FY24 budget had already been drafted.

The MRGO was a catastrophic project, destroying and degrading 1.2 million acres of protective marsh, swamps and other bodies of water in the Pontchartrain Basin. This destruction proved deadly as surge along the channel led to decimation of communities during Hurricane Katrina. Some communities along the MRGO, like the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans, are still working to fully recover.

While the Corps has had a MRGO Ecosystem Restoration Plan for many years, no funding has been allocated for implementation. After the 2009 closure of the MRGO, the Army Corps finalized a plan for restoration in 2012. However, due to a dispute over responsibility for funding, further action was halted.

The Corps wanted Louisiana to bear some of the costs of restoration and would not move forward without that cost-share. The state pushed back due to congressional intent that the Corps bear the full cost of restoration and court findings that federal management decisions were solely responsible for the damage caused by MRGO. With a resulting dispute over cost share, the plan sat unimplemented for a decade.

In December 2022, however, Congress passed the Water Resources

Development Act of 2022 (WRDA). Through the passage of WRDA 2022, Congress agreed to fund MRGO ecosystem restoration at full federal expense.

It's worth noting that the state and partners has not been waiting on federal action all this time. There has been significant action taken to implement parts of the MRGO restoration plan including hydrologic restoration, shoreline protection, and marsh creation projects – projects like the Lake Borgne Marsh Creation Project, the Biloxi Marsh Living Shoreline Project, New Orleans East Landbridge, and the Central Wetlands Restoration Project.

Congress initially authorized MRGO restoration 14 years ago. Louisiana has waited long enough for implementation of the Corps' MRGO Ecosystem Restoration Plan; there should be no additional delays. The Corps must prioritize MRGO ecosystem restoration with all possible speed and efficiency.

The Army Corps should immediately initiate work to restore the MRGO and the wetlands destroyed as a result of that channel. Any cost increases (or study update needs) resulting from the Army Corps' long-delayed action should not slow these efforts.

You can read the letter on our policy page at [Lawwildlifefed.org/policy-center](https://lawwildlifefed.org/policy-center). ■

EPA TURNS OVER REGULATORY CONTROL OF CARBON SEQUESTRATION WELLS TO LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

by Stacy Ortego, Coastal Policy Manager

On December 28, 2023, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has approved Louisiana's application for regulatory oversight of carbon dioxide injection wells, known as Class VI wells. The Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (LDNR) will be the agency charged with the permitting, compliance, and enforcement of Class VI (carbon sequestration) wells under the Underground Injection Control Program (UIC).

This transfer of authority is expected to reduce the timeline of permitting carbon sequestration projects in the state. Louisiana has the most pending carbon capture projects in the nation. Louisiana is only the third state to be granted such oversight by the EPA; North Dakota was granted primacy in 2013 and Wyoming in 2020.

Louisiana applied for regulatory control (primacy) of Class VI wells in 2021. LWF submitted comments to the EPA regarding state primacy in July 2023 during a public comment period after the EPA signed a proposed rule to approve Louisiana's request to have primary enforcement responsibility. In our comments to EPA, LWF noted that a state's UIC program must meet strict safeguards when considering a Class VI well permit application to ensure protection of the public's drinking water including requiring applicants have:

- Operating requirements to ensure the injection activity will not endanger USDWs (underground sources of drinking water) or human health.

- Financial assurance mechanisms sufficient to cover the cost for all phases of the geologic sequestration project including the post injection site care period and until site closure has been approved by the permitting authority.
- Emergency and remedial response plans.
- Reporting of all testing and monitoring results to the permitting authority to ensure the well is operating in compliance with all permit and regulatory requirements.

LWF's comments highlighted concerns about environmental justice, siting, public input and engagement, staffing, application transparency, and evaluating Louisiana's performance.

LWF is encouraged to see the EPA include specific environmental justice provisions in the Memorandum of Agreement between the EPA and Louisiana. The requirements include:

- An enhanced, inclusive public participation process.
- Consideration of environmental justice impacts on communities in permitting including environmental hazards, exposure pathways, as well as susceptible subpopulations.
- Incorporation of other mitigation measures to ensure Class VI projects do not increase environmental impacts and public health risks in already overburdened communities. Measures designed to protect residential areas could include carbon dioxide monitoring and release notification networks, and installation of enhanced pollution controls.

The Louisiana Legislature approved seven new employees (to be dedicated to well reviews) and over \$800,000 in new funding for the Class VI UIC program. While this is encouraging, the state must also be prepared to take on this highly technical industry for the long term and attract and retain the expertise needed to adequately provide rigorous analysis of applications. The state must also commit to ensuring the Office of Conservation is adequately funded to keep pace with evolving technologies, as the technology needed to monitor well activity is expensive.

LDNR has stated that the next steps include EPA and LDNR working to transfer 22 existing Class VI well applications from federal to state oversight. Some changes to state regulations include the prohibition of storage in salt caverns, not allowing permits to be issued for multiple injection wells at once, and monitoring systems that exceed federal standards. While it is encouraging that the state's rules will be more stringent than the EPA's, proper enforcement will be critical.

When the state through the Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources, the Governor and the Legislature all cite Class VI wells as the energy future, the commitments of today must be upheld by the government of tomorrow.

Though LWF is supportive of LDNR's oversight of carbon sequestration wells, we remain vigilant in holding our regulators accountable to ensure the proper monitoring of these wells for the protection of Louisiana's citizens, wildlife, and habitats. ■



LWF HIGHLIGHTS WILDLIFE CONCERNS FOR PROPOSED WIND PROJECTS IN LOUISIANA NEARSHORE WATERS

by Stacy Ortego, Coastal Policy Manager

Two operating agreements have been approved by the Louisiana State Mineral and Energy Board for offshore wind projects in Louisiana state waters off Cameron Parish (Cajun Wind) and Terrebonne/Lafourche Parishes (Gulf Wind).

At public hearings in Thibodaux, Houma, and Cameron, LWF expressed concerns to the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (LDNR) highlighting some of our concerns with potential impacts to wildlife (especially birds). The letter is posted on our policy center website at **[Lawildlifefed.org/policy-center](https://lawildlifefed.org/policy-center)**.

While LWF acknowledges the important role that renewable energy plays in our nation's energy transition, it must be done responsibly in a way that avoids areas of most significant impact. LWF has serious concerns about the wildlife impacts of offshore wind projects in Louisiana nearshore waters.

Responsible offshore wind development (i) follows the mitigation hierarchy to first avoid, then minimize, mitigate, and monitor adverse impacts on marine and coastal habitats and the wildlife that rely on them, (ii) meaningfully engages state and local governments and stakeholders from the outset, (iii) uses the best available scientific and technological data to ensure science-based and stakeholder-informed decision making, and (iv) is adaptable by incorporating technological advances as they become available.

At this point in the process, comments were only sought on the draft operating agreements, which were approved in December 2023. Environmental impacts are not necessarily considered until later in the process as operators prepare documents to apply for a permit. LWF feels it is important to point out wildlife



concerns early and often, especially considering how critical the entire Louisiana coast and nearshore waters (0-3 nautical miles from shore) is to a variety of wildlife – especially nearshore and migrating birds.

There is a significant difference in the process for offshore wind energy projects in nearshore state waters vs. far offshore in federal waters.

LDNR is leading the state waters process while the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is heading the federal process. During the federal comment process for siting offshore wind in the Gulf of Mexico, in which BOEM solicited stakeholder and expert input to help inform its siting decisions, LWF joined other concerned groups cautioning against permitting offshore wind turbines within 20 nautical miles from shore. This science-based precautionary measure was recommended (and adopted) to protect marine mammals, neotropical migrants, coastal and marine birds, and wintering waterfowl.

Nearly 30% of the birds in North America have disappeared in the last 50 years. Louisiana’s coast and nearshore waters are critically important habitat for birds, with an estimated 100 million migratory, nesting, and wintering birds relying on Louisiana’s coast annually. Louisiana hosts a significant percentage of many populations of colonial waterbird species found in the northern Gulf of Mexico, including sandwich terns (83%), Forster’s terns (71%), royal terns (51%), tricolored herons (48%), brown pelicans (47%), and black skimmers (44%), among others.

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) has raised concerns as well with the potential impact of wind projects in state waters to birds and the lack of data available to make science-based decisions. LDWF has indicated the need for more information on collision vulnerability and displacement vulnerability. Interactions of birds with wind energy infrastructure has only been looked at for larger bodied birds such as ducks and loons – and only for wind projects far offshore. Research is needed for colonial waterbirds near colony sites or for small-bodied migratory birds. Data gaps that need to be filled for

proper assessment include flight altitude and migration pathways for migrant species, home range size, foraging distance, and flight behaviors for colonial waterbirds as well as identification of activity hotspots.

Other wildlife considerations highlighted included the need to study potential impacts to bats, butterflies, sea turtles, benthic habitat, and fish. Onshore wind is known to cause significant impacts to bats, however, research is needed on the potential impacts (if any) of offshore wind projects. Monarch butterflies, a candidate species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), has an extensive migration route that includes Louisiana. Five of the world’s seven sea turtle species inhabit the Gulf of Mexico year-round, and all five of these species are protected by under the ESA (leatherbacks, loggerheads, Kemp’s ridleys, green, and hawksbill). Nearshore Louisiana waters are also home to two coastal fish species that are protected under the ESA (giant manta rays and Gulf sturgeon).

Offshore wind development in state waters is unprecedented in the United States and rare in Europe, as it often poses greater risks to wildlife and habitats, which is why LWF urges a more robust process that involves stakeholders at the outset – a key provision of “responsible development”. Much data is still needed in order to conduct proper risk assessment and site analysis to inform responsible decision-making when considering projects so close to shore.

LWF will continue to be engaged on this issue and highlight future opportunities for the public to offer feedback. ■



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LWF'S BUSINESS ALLIANCE DEDICATED TO PROMOTING AND PROTECTING LA WILDLIFE, HABITAT

The Louisiana Wildlife Federation invites you to join hands in preserving our state's precious natural resources, a cause that aligns seamlessly with the interests of businesses operating in Louisiana. Embracing the beauty and abundance of our outdoor opportunities enhances the appeal of Louisiana as a vibrant place to live and work, thereby bolstering our collective economic prosperity. By forging a partnership between the LWF and Louisiana's visionary business leaders, we can strengthen the vital link between our economy and the protection of our invaluable natural assets. Your organization can play a crucial role in shaping a brighter future for our beloved Sportsman's Paradise, ensuring its pristine allure for generations to come.

If you own a business or know a business that might be interested in joining our Business Alliance, please contact Rebecca Triche at 225-344-6707 or rebecca@lawildlifefed.org. For more information visit Lawildlifefed.org. ■

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be dynamic, changing as conditions
change, seeking always to become
more effective.”**

~ Rachel Carson

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