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## Wisner trust finds partners to rebuild coastline

By **KATINA A. GAUDET**  
South Lafourche Bureau

**FOURCHON** -- Local and federal agencies have come together to protect more than 2,000 acres of fragile beach and marshland in southern Lafourche Parish.

The Edward Wisner Donation, a non-profit land trust, has leveraged a \$150,000 grant for damages its properties incurred into the \$700,000 Lafourche Parish Wisner Restoration Project.

Wisner (as it's commonly called) is responsible for more than 35,000 acres of wetlands and water bottoms in Lafourche, St. John the Baptist and Jefferson parishes.

It owns about nine miles of beach channeled between Bay Champagne, near the Greater Lafourche Port Commission's public boat launch, and the Gulf of Mexico, as well as marshland in the area.

Officials say that land loss in the area has increased throughout the years, as it has in most coastal areas. They say that over the last 50 years, about 23 percent of the property has been converted to open water.

The land loss is due to wave erosion, storms, subsidence and other factors, including the dredging associated with the boat launch and access canal. That transition has been a significant blow to marine wildlife habitat.

After receiving the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Community-based Restoration Program grant, Wisner sought help from other groups to aid in restoration efforts at its Fourchon properties. That would include beach protection, marsh



Aimey Tregre (stooping, foreground) and Candice Turner, both members of Nicholls State University's Biological Society, plant black mangroves along a stretch of beach owned by the Edward Wisner Donation, a nonprofit land trust, in Fourchon Friday. A number of local groups have joined forces with a federal agency to embark on a \$700,000 coastal restoration project to benefit the beach, marshland and marine habitat. (KATINA GAUDET/NYTRNG)

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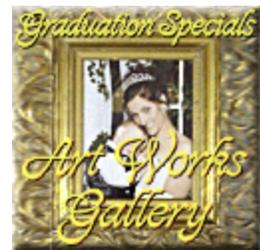
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creation and restoration of fish habitat.

"It's been great," Cathy Norman, secretary treasurer and land manager, said of the partnerships. "Everyone has donated well above and beyond what we'd hoped. It's just an incredible proactive partnership."

Wisner first engaged a Houma engineering firm, Morris P. Hebert Inc., to help with the effort, then others pledged support.

Partners include the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, ChevronTexaco, the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana (which provided \$100,000 for the effort) the Greater Lafourche Port Commission, the Natural Resources Conservation Services' Plant Materials Center in Galliano, Restore America's Estuaries and the University of New Orleans.

Using the grant as leverage for more money is the mission of the NOAA's program, said Cheryl Brodnax, a marine habitat resource specialist with NOAA.

"They've been able to leverage federal money five to one (over local money) because there's so much awareness here," Brodnax said. "It's a fantastic example of community partners coming together."

### **MONEY INTO ACTION**

On Friday, partners and volunteers gathered for the second day of vegetative plantings and sand-fence building on the Wisner properties near Fourchon.

Volunteers from the University of New Orleans worked to build fencing along the stretch of beach that officials say will help prevent sand loss -- and thus, beach reduction -- there. They'll continue planting through next week.

The beach has already taken a significant pounding, with Tropical Storm Isidore and Hurricane Lili cutting through the beach in three different spots. Nearby marshland also in the group's trust is also of concern.

If the fences are successful in trapping sand and creating sand dunes, the area could be planted with vegetation to further protect the beach.

Also planned for construction is a protective rock structure to guard an access canal's unprotected bank, as well as dredge material from Wisner's own waterbottoms for placement in shallow, open water areas north of the canal. That is expected to create 40 to 45 acres of new marsh.

Removing an artificial levee that is creating impounding in the area will also benefit about 1,850 acres of essential fish habitat, they say.

Depending on the time it takes to obtain a permit for the dredging component, the entire project should be complete in late August.

### **APPRECIATION DEVELOPS**

Some who turned out for a day in the sun this week were community



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volunteers from the Nicholls State Biological Society, University of New Orleans, ChevronTexaco, BTNEP and others.

A few of the younger volunteers say they enjoyed the experience and appreciate the situation's gravity.

Metairie resident Beth Hudson, a 17-year old senior at Archbishop Chapelle High School, was busy planting black mangroves along the beach's shoreline Friday with her father, John, who works for ChevronTexaco.

She said she was somewhat familiar with the plight of Louisiana's coast -- and its residents' susceptibility to storm events as a result, and was happy to see others lending a hand.

"I think it's great that people are helping here to do this," she said.

Another helping in the effort 9-year-old Alyssa Tregre, a third-grader at Vacherie Primary, who came along with her mother, Aimey, a member of the Nicholls Biological Society.

Alyssa Tregre said she was proud of her part in the group's efforts.

"I'm bring new life in a totally different way," she said while planting black mangroves, which will help stabilize the shoreline there.

Project partners say the type of community involvement on behalf of the Wisner property will be necessary through the state's coastal area to convince federal lawmakers and others of not only the state's need for federal restoration funding, but also of the state's commitment to its own restoration.

Officials say that Louisiana loses about 25 square miles of wetlands each year.

"When you consider how labor intensive this is and the scope of our problems, it's going to take community-based projects such as this, as well as large, river sediment diversions to address this," said Leslie Robichaux McVeigh with the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program.

But also, "It's imperative that landowners in South Louisiana take a broader view of the impact that coastal erosion has on our state and the entire nation," said Norman.

"These efforts work toward a goal of saving wetlands, informing the nation of the magnitude of the problem and proving that there is a strong commitment and dedication in Louisiana to work together to find solutions."