

Executive Summary

Toward Holistic Coastal Resilience

A cross-government assessment of Louisiana's resilience challenges and opportunities

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In 2020, Governor Edwards joined ten other states by naming a Chief Resilience Officer to advance a cross-agency, holistic approach to the challenges and opportunities associated with the impacts of environmental hazards in Louisiana's coastal area. After two years of engagement, vulnerability assessments, and the exploration of options for adaptation to better meet the needs of its residents now and into the future, it is clearer than ever before that environmental changes in coastal Louisiana are producing direct and indirect consequences for the core missions and functions of every agency in state government.

While some adaptations are already underway and other ideas for enhancing the resilience of the state are still in development, an inescapable finding of this work is that the environmental challenges in store for Louisiana that are being exacerbated by climate change will be enormous and will not be limited to the coastal region of the state. Adequately addressing these needs will necessitate maintaining a formal and continued emphasis on resilience-building in government across all hazards and across the entire state through permanent positions, structures, and processes. Furthermore, a single focal point for statewide efforts will be essential for avoiding damages to infrastructure and assets, preserving and promoting economic and workforce development, sustaining the natural environment, serving and protecting vulnerable people and cultures, and securing funding to implement adaptation strategies and projects.

Agency Vulnerability Findings:

The most common and expected vulnerability to state agencies are to buildings and assets like transportation infrastructure, facilities, vehicles, or equipment. This affects both budgets and the delivery of services. Service providing agencies also face scattered clients, damages to their own employees' homes, and new, post-disaster demands for programming without the benefit of additional staff. Economically, natural disasters hurt Louisiana's attractiveness to business and workforce retention and recruitment; they can raise costs for those living and working in the state further hindering economic resilience and reducing productivity. Finally, in addition to land loss and habitat change, efforts to manage and regulate the protection of the natural environment can be severely challenged by extreme weather events and slower-moving changes to the coast.

Identified Adaption Options:

Quality, actionable data exists and is being utilized to inform permitting, construction, and investments in coastal Louisiana, but additional work is needed to mainstream the fortification and siting of

community and state infrastructure and facilities. The “no wrong door” model is being piloted by social services agencies in Lafayette and St. Landry parishes. This model should be further adapted and expanded to meet the needs of communities and individuals post-disaster. Workshops are building cultural bridges between communities and preserving arts, traditions, and creativity in the face of land loss. Negative economic perceptions of Louisiana can be addressed through the promotion of Louisiana’s successful coastal program and direct programming for businesses to prepare for disasters and plan for the future. Environmental and natural resources managers can modify their research agendas to more directly address impacts from climate change; serve as resources to local governments and users; and can adapt or relocate monitoring equipment to preserve data collection.

Many identified adaptations are reactionary and require capacity and resources to implement. Louisiana needs to become more proactive about adapting to the changes and challenges in store for the coming decades. The following findings and recommendations can continue that work.

Findings and Recommendations:

- **Formally establish the role of Chief Resilience Officer to advance and coordinate adaptation throughout Louisiana.**
- **Resilience efforts should expand to include more hazards, all areas of the state, and additional partners outside of state government.**
- **Resilience criteria should be explicitly integrated into investment decisions regarding the state’s capital investments.**
- **Louisiana should adopt FEMA’s Enhanced Hazard Mitigation Plan.**
- **Coordination should be enhanced among agencies to maximize pre-disaster mitigation and resilient disaster recovery.**
- **Long-term resilience will require additional investments in “receiving communities,”** welcoming, prepared locations less susceptible to the extremes of environmental hazards.
- **Engagement with resilience coordinators should continue in order to develop multi-dimensional adaptation options** to better serve vulnerable populations; address chronic, but slower moving environmental changes; and foster stronger collaborations across agencies.
- **Limitations on capacity that curb success in adapting to environmental risks should be addressed.** Lack of human and financial resources directly impacts state, local, and community participation in adaptation measures and general planning for the future.