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## SUBURBAN AND STATE

### Official: La. to expand coastal commitment



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**BRYAN TUCK/THE ADVOCATE**

Executive Assistant to the Governor on Coastal Action Garret Graves speaks during a meeting at the Federal Courthouse in Lafayette to discuss coastal preservation in southwest Louisiana.

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By **AMY WOLD**

Advocate staff writer

Published: Feb 25, 2008

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Louisiana will change the way it addresses coastal restoration and protection issues in the next four years, a state official said recently.

Garret Graves, the new director of the Governor's Office of Coastal Affairs, said the changes will involve a bigger financial commitment from the state, more involvement in coordinating state and federal agencies, and a focus on doing larger-scale projects.

"If we're not going to do this (restore and protect the coast) then we need to stop the other economic development initiatives in Louisiana," he said.

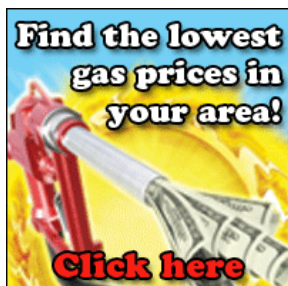
There will also be changes in the short term as Graves and others work to make changes in the fiscal year 2009 annual plan that will go to the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority.

Those changes are supposed to be presented to the authority at 9:30 a.m. Tuesday at 130 J. Norman Efferson Hall, Room 214, at the LSU Agricultural Center.

Although there have been several public meetings about the draft plan, the amended draft plan will be reopened for public comment, Graves said.

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The previously released draft annual plan for fiscal year 2009 included \$144 million for coastal restoration and management along with \$15 million for levee construction, Graves said. There is much more in levee work being done, he said, but much of it is being funded with 100 percent federal money.

Graves said there will be some major changes to the annual plan.

For example, although \$15 million is set aside for levee construction, President Bush's budget calls for the state to come up with \$1.8 billion in cost share for the New Orleans area in the next four years, he said.

That means the amount the state needs to put up will increase. That money could either come from inside the current plan — which means something else will receive less funding — or Gov. Bobby Jindal's administration must commit more funding, he said.

That discussion will depend on the timing of the governor's budget presentation, Graves said.

Another change could be more of a focus on larger scale projects rather than the smaller scale ones included in the annual plan despite the uncertainty surrounding them, he said.

"We want to have a better balance of some of these larger scale restoration projects," he said. "We want to be progressing some of those."

Graves said the state is looking at a number of larger scale concepts right now that would be massive diversions, including creating an artificial third delta and making a large diversion in lower Plaquemines Parish.

"We've had an underinvestment in coastal restoration and levee protection on the state's part, historically," Graves said. "We're going to have to move forward with the best solutions available to us."

Also, he said, the state needs to be flexible enough to respond to the ecosystem changes that occur.

All of this will take a fundamental change in the way the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers moves forward with projects.

"The science and technology capacity in this state has to be expanded," Graves said and it needs to be organized so it can directly influence and advise design and construction of projects.

Graves said the federal Water Resources Development Act authorized \$100 million for a science and technology program and another \$100 million for a demonstration program, which could be used to test science and technology that gets developed. He said he wants to better coordinate that effort.

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