

Letter: Seize opportunity to save coast

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Few in Louisiana realize our state has undertaken one of the largest public works projects the world has ever seen.

Louisiana's Comprehensive Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast describes a protection and restoration system for all of south Louisiana inclusive of levees, river diversions, ecosystem restoration, locks and canals.

The master plan, which is estimated to cost \$60 billion, envisions construction during the next few decades. When completed, this innovative system will be renowned not only for its size, but also for the cutting-edge science, technology and construction methods used in its creation. The beneficiaries of this system will be the residents of Louisiana, as well as the millions of Americans who depend on the commerce and industry throughout the area.

For the companies able to participate in the development of this protection and restoration system, there is an appreciation that the success of the effort will not be defined by their completion of a particular project but by the successful completion of the entire system. The Coast Builders Coalition is a group of companies active in coastal restoration and hurricane protection projects in Louisiana that are committed to constructing a fully functioning system that enables a sustainable coast for decades to come. Louisianians deserve a safe and sustainable coast, and it should be clear after Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita that an incomplete and/or deficient system will be a waste of taxpayer dollars that gives our citizens a false sense of well-being.

Thankfully, since the hurricanes of 2005, Louisiana has made significant strides toward planning, funding and implementing the comprehensive system we need. Recently, the state dedicated \$300 million in surplus funds to coastal restoration and hurricane protection. This historic funding commitment demonstrates the high priority placed on this important issue by Gov. Bobby Jindal and Louisiana legislators. The president and Congress have also made billions of dollars of appropriations to Louisiana's coast since 2005.

While these efforts are outstanding, especially considering that they were unimaginable before the hurricanes, they represent only a fraction of the dollars necessary to provide Louisiana a sustainable coast. It is critical that local, state and federal governments continue to effectively fund and administer the system described in Louisiana's Comprehensive Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast.

Incomplete levee systems or ineffective restoration projects will not serve Louisiana well, nor will they distinguish Louisiana's system as one of the finest public works projects in the world. While there is a window of opportunity to restore a crumbling ecosystem and meaningfully protect south Louisiana

residents, commerce and industry, we must appreciate that the wind and the waves will continue to threaten our coast until we build a system equal to their might.

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