

WORKING TO RESTORE COASTAL LOUISIANA

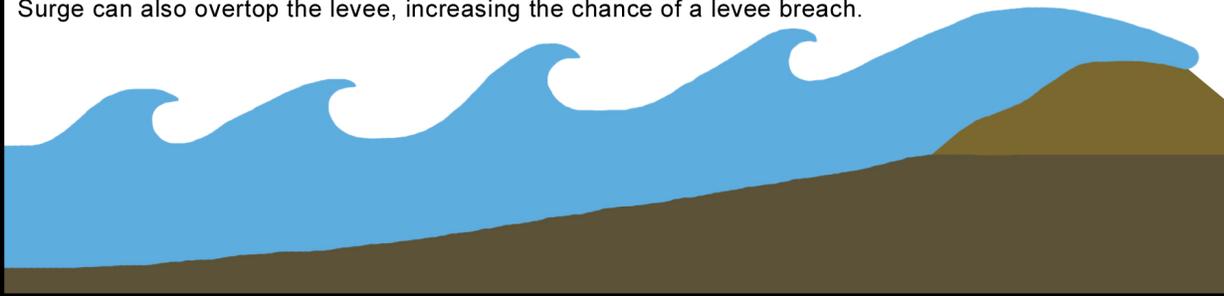
Wetlands and Barrier Islands: Our Communities' First Line of Defense

Strong tropical storms and hurricanes regularly bring heavy rain and violent winds to Louisiana's coast. However, **the biggest storm threat to communities, life, and property is surge**: a bulge of water formed by wind and the low pressure core of a strong storm. As storm surge rolls ashore topped by damaging waves, it piles up against natural and man-made features on land. The combination of surge and waves can push houses off their foundations, wash away bridges, and blow earthen levees apart.

Wetlands and barrier islands are Louisiana's first line of defense against storm surge and tropical-force winds. Unfortunately, our natural storm protection system is slipping into the Gulf of Mexico. Every day, we lose enough coastal land to cover 32 football fields. This rapid rate of loss puts nearly 2 million people in the coastal zone at risk to more frequent and severe flooding.

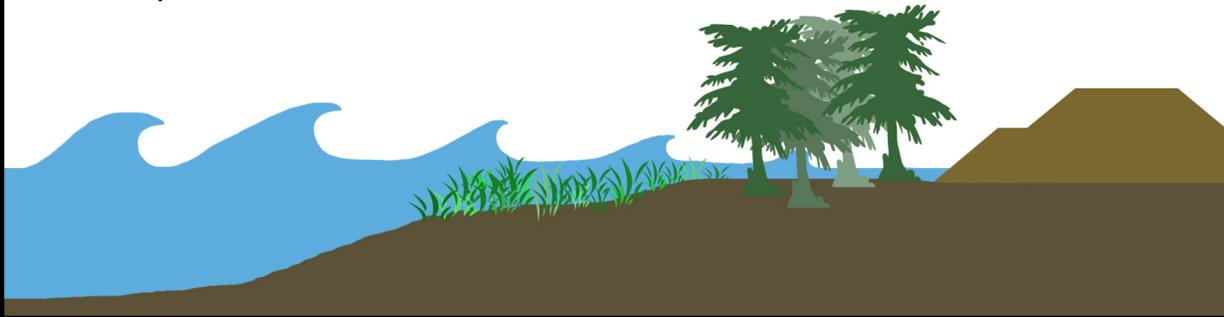
Levee With No Natural Buffer

When a levee is next to open water, the face and the crest of the levee are vulnerable to wave attack. Surge can also overtop the levee, increasing the chance of a levee breach.



Levee Protected by Coastal Wetlands

Waves and surge encounter resistance when they move over marshes and through cypress. This resistance reduces the height of surge and waves and slows the movement of water toward communities. Cypress forests also knock down waves by blocking wind. **The wider the wetland buffer, the higher the level of protection.**



We need to use **all the tools in the hurricane protection toolbox** to protect Louisiana's families and their livelihoods, including:

- **Restored coastal wetlands and barrier lands;**
- **Storm resilient actions such as elevating our homes;** and
- **Stronger, strategically placed levees.**

Protecting New Orleans and Other Coastal Communities

A levee exposed to open water—like the one lining the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO)—is more likely to fail than a levee protected by wetlands. The MRGO levee catastrophically failed during Hurricane Katrina, increasing the flooding in communities in the New Orleans area.

Although the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is working to reduce future risks to communities by improving the levee system and building a surge barrier, **the coastal buffer between New Orleans and the Gulf is shrinking every day**. What remains is in disrepair, damaged by salt water, erosion, subsidence, and sea level rise.

National Wildlife Federation, Environmental Defense Fund, and National Audubon Society are working with the **MRGO Must Go Coalition** to advocate for wetland and barrier island restoration in the area affected by MRGO. After Katrina, Congress ordered the Corps



to undertake a comprehensive study of MRGO. Their study should consider how existing projects—such as the rock dam at Bayou la Loutre and the surge barrier near the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway—can be combined effectively with wetland restoration. The combination of hurricane protection structures and restored wetlands will reduce storm surge and protect communities such as the Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans East, and Chalmette.

What You Can Do to Help

- **Tell the Corps to complete the closure of the MRGO and to restore the surrounding wetlands.** Get a free yard sign or bumper sticker and write a letter to the President at www.mrgomustgo.org. You can also join the MRGO Must Go Facebook group to learn about public events in your area.
- **Contact your elected officials.** Congress and the Louisiana Legislature ultimately control the funding for coastal restoration. Tell your elected representatives that restoring wetlands and coastal areas is critical to the safety of New Orleans.
- **Tell a friend!** This is a national effort to save a national resource. Please ask your friends and families to take part.

National Wildlife Federation, Environmental Defense Fund, and National Audubon Society, along with our national and state partners, are advocating for a bold approach to restoring the wetlands and coastal areas that protect Louisiana's people and wildlife.

For more information, call 337-255-2831 or visit www.nwf.org/louisiana