COASTAL HAZARD MITIGATION IN LOUISIANA: OFFERING GUIDANCE ON SITING AND CONSTRUCTION FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES

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BACKGROUND
The Louisiana Sea Grant Legal Program (LSGLP) has embarked on a project to write a Louisiana Coastal Hazard Mitigation Guidebook (Guidebook), a series of three brochures, and hold a series of workshops on hazard mitigation planning. The idea for this project began pre-Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, when Louisiana State University (LSU), the LSU AgCenter, and the Louisiana Sea Grant College Program (LSG) were planning a one-day conference for state, local, and coastal leaders on the importance of land use planning to combat coastal erosion. Conference speaker Dennis J. Hwang, a geologist and land use attorney and author of the Hawaii Coastal Hazard Mitigation Guidebook a planning tool for the state and local governments of Hawaii. Post-Katrina and Rita, the LSGLP is working with Mr. Hwang and other experts at LSU to write and publish a similar guidebook for Louisiana. This extended abstract is a summary of that effort.

INTRODUCTION
The Guidebook will serve as education and outreach to local coastal officials and planners, builders, and Louisiana residents to assist them in making wise decisions as they rebuild coastal communities. The concepts in the guidebook will apply to all parishes in coastal Louisiana and will differentiate between rural and urban areas since different areas will have particular hazard mitigation needs and issues. The book will recommend that the hazard mitigation measures be put forth as voluntary steps. We hope that if people are given information and a set of options that show them the benefits of hazard mitigation at the earliest stage of development (or rebuilding), then they will be more likely to incorporate them. If a few forward-thinking persons embrace coastal hazard mitigation concepts in rebuilding, others may follow suit.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita delivered devastating blows to Louisiana’s already fragile coastline. These hurricanes cost lives, damaged property, and caused further deterioration of the coast. The LSGLP has the expertise to assist state and local policymakers and the public with legal issues affecting coastal hazard mitigation and has enlisted the technical assistance of experts from Louisiana State University on floodplain management, architecture, and hazard mitigation to help prepare the Guidebook. It is imperative that coastal Louisiana overhauls siting and construction techniques to prepare for future storm events.
While buildings cannot be made indestructible, they can be built stronger and safer. Educating state and local policymakers and the public will ultimately benefit Louisiana as it forges ahead with the enormous task of rebuilding. Knowledge of relevant laws and techniques for siting and building structures will allow and encourage state and local officials and the public to make safe decisions.

**BROCHURES**

A series of three brochures will precede the Guidebook. The brochures will present topics from the Guidebook, but in a simpler format to get information out quicker. The first brochure focuses on the recently passed building code legislation, followed by brochures on property rights and insurance issues.

The Louisiana Legislature adopted the International Codes (e.g., the International Building Code, and International Residential Code) shortly after Katrina and Rita struck the state. The legislature also created the State Uniform Construction Code Council, whose primary function is to adopt and review the state uniform construction code, provide training and education for code officials, and accept requests for amendments to the code. The brochure highlights relevant portion of the law and briefly discusses the issues surrounding its implementation from both a local government and citizen perspective.

Property rights and insurance will continue to be crucial issues as Louisiana moves further along in the rebuilding process. Decisions on where to site new homes and businesses, whether or not to allow rebuilding in certain areas (either at all or only under certain conditions), and the availability and cost of insurance will continue to play significant roles.

**GUIDEBOOK**

The Guidebook will set forth voluntary guidelines for siting and construction of homes and businesses and recommends land use planning as a tool to help ensure that communities rebuild safely. The Guidebook will offer practical recommendations that can be easily implemented at any stage in the development process, but suggest that incorporation at the earliest stage of development is ideal, rather than later in the development process or after a storm event. Implementation at the early stage of development is not only more cost-effective; it also will provide peace of mind to the homeowner or business owner.

The Guidebook will recommend a light-handed approach for implementation of the techniques described. A light-handed approach is preferred because there is likely to be less resistance from the public if the tools are presented as guidance rather than requirements. When sound and safe ways of building that are cost-effective and relatively easy to implement are demonstrated, they are more likely to be incorporated peacefully than when mandated by the government. Changes to some laws and regulations, e.g., the 2005 passage of a statewide building code, will be necessary and appropriate to provide an umbrella from which more specific guidance may follow. The Guidebook will offer specific options for implementing voluntary approaches. To
illustrate this, Figure 1 presents a sliding scale of government implementation, along with examples of the types of action at each stage.

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*Figure 1 shows a model government implementation scale for policy and planning guidance. This implementation scale was originally created by Dennis J. Hwang and has been adapted for Louisiana by the LSGLP.*

The audience for the Guidebook consists of local officials, planners, coastal managers, and the public. The Guidebook will present an overview of the current land use law regime in Louisiana and the development process, which will not only educate but also set the stage for recommendations. A companion project entitled “Land Use Planning in Coastal Louisiana: Recognizing the Necessity for Change Post-Disaster” will contain land use policy recommendations, that will complement the Guidebook.
WORKSHOPS
A series of three workshops will serve as another outreach and education tool. They will take place after publication of the brochures and Guidebook and will be located in strategic coastal regions of the state. The workshops will mainly serve to present ideas discussed in the Guidebook to local officials and planners to generate discussion on how rebuilding and development in the future may be planned. The workshops will be one-day events.

Additional workshops may be held in the coastal parishes for members of the public, pending sufficient interest. Presentations at larger meetings and conferences at the state, regional, and national levels also may be held to promote dialogue in wider audience and engage state and local officials in coastal states on the necessity of mitigation planning at the earliest stage of the development process, rather than later in the process or after a storm event.

CONCLUSION
As the rebuilding process in Louisiana continues, the Guidebook, brochures, and workshops will assist officials in making wise decisions. Issues such as relocation of communities, new rules on how to build, and how to best manage and conserve the coastal ecosystem for the protection and benefit of Louisiana’s coastal citizens will play dominant roles in the discussion. These decisions will not be easy and will require the State and local governments to strongly consider land use planning and mitigation planning. By providing officials, planners, and citizens with guidance on the available tools and their implementation, the Guidebook will aid them in their enormous task of rebuilding.

LITERATURE CITED


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