



*Turning Questions Into Answers.*



*Fairbank,  
Maslin,  
Maullin &  
Associates*

*Opinion Research &  
Public Policy Analysis*

**TO:** Interested Parties

**FROM:** David Metz  
Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates

Lori Weigel  
Public Opinion Strategies

**RE:** Executive Summary of Opinion Research Key Findings Regarding Loss of Wetlands and Coastal Erosion among Southern Louisiana Voters

**DATE:** August 18, 2008

The Democratic polling firm of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates (FMM&A) and the Republican polling firm of Public Opinion Strategies (POS) recently partnered to complete extensive opinion research among Southern Louisiana voters regarding the loss of wetlands and coastal erosion. This research included a series of four focus groups, and a regional survey of 500 registered voters in southern Louisiana

Among the key specific findings of the survey are the following:

- Southern Louisiana residents value wetlands as wildlife habitat, an economic engine, and a central part of the culture and food of the region. Even more importantly, a solid majority of Southern Louisianans view both wetlands and coastal areas as the “first line of defense against hurricanes” (71% say this describes wetlands very well and 63% say the same about coastal areas). In fact, this was a phrase that was evoked by focus group respondents repeatedly.
- Perhaps most striking is just how very important these concerns are for Southern Louisiana voters. Both coastal erosion and loss of wetlands are on par with gasoline prices (at a time of record prices) and even higher than the economy or crime as the most serious problems facing their area, as one can see in the following graph:

Current Issues	Extremely Serious	Extrm/Very Serious
Gas prices	62%	87%
Coastal erosion and loss of barrier islands	56%	84%

Loss of wetlands and marshes	<b>50%</b>	<b>81%</b>
Strength of existing levees	<b>45%</b>	<b>75%</b>
Lack of levees	<b>38%</b>	<b>68%</b>
Rebuilding from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita taking too long	<b>36%</b>	<b>70%</b>
The economy	<b>34%</b>	<b>68%</b>
Crime	<b>33%</b>	<b>65%</b>
Loss of habitat for fish and wildlife	<b>29%</b>	<b>62%</b>
Pollution of rivers, lakes and streams	<b>25%</b>	<b>57%</b>
The impact of oil and gas drilling on the environment	<b>22%</b>	<b>40%</b>

- Underscoring this concern is the fact that 91% say that wetlands “require urgent attention” and 87% say the same about coastal areas.
- Residents perceive grave consequences in not acting to restore the wetlands and coastal areas. The vast majority believe that it is “almost certain” or “very likely” that hurricane damage will worsen, that communities and jobs will be lost, and that wildlife will become more scarce:

<b>Likelihood of Happening if Continue to Lose Wetlands</b>	<b>Almost Certain</b>	<b>Certain/Very Likely</b>
The damage from hurricanes will be worse	<b>58%</b>	<b>86%</b>
The economy of Southern Louisiana will be threatened	<b>43%</b>	<b>78%</b>
Entire communities will be lost	<b>43%</b>	<b>71%</b>
Crawfish, oysters and native fish and wildlife will become more scarce	<b>40%</b>	<b>73%</b>
The unique culture of Southern Louisiana will be threatened	<b>32%</b>	<b>63%</b>
Fresh drinking water will become more scarce as saltwater creeps in	<b>26%</b>	<b>51%</b>

- The vast majority see hope for southern Louisiana as they believe that wetlands and coastal areas CAN be restored and protected. Fully 85% say that wetlands can be rebuilt, and 76% say they can be protected.
- There is also very strong support for two policy approaches to wetlands restoration.

90% support, 70% strongly support

*Rebuild barrier islands and wetlands using sediment dredged from rivers*

87% support, 62% strongly support

*Divert water and sediment from the Mississippi River into undeveloped wetland areas in order to rebuild damaged wetlands and protect existing ones*

Support is strong across all demographic and geographic sub-groups for these two actions.

Overall, the research clearly demonstrates that Southern Louisiana residents are concerned about coastal erosion and the loss of wetlands, perceive grave consequences if nothing is done, and value the wetlands and coastal areas on a number of levels. The electorate strongly supports taking policy actions to help these areas, categorizes wetlands and coastal areas as requiring urgent attention, and prioritizes wetlands restoration over building new levees when forced to choose.

*Methodology Statement:*

*FMM&A and POS completed telephone interviews with voters in Coastal Louisiana, which was defined as the following parishes: Iberia, Jefferson, Lafourche, Livingston\*, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Martin, St. Mary, St. Tammany\*, Tangipahoa\*, Terrebonne, Vermilion. Margin of error of +/- 4.38% overall, and vary by sub-sample. Interviews were conducted June 24-26, 2008. The survey was preceded by four focus groups conducted May 28-29 in New Orleans and Houma among voters from those regions. Groups were segmented by socio-economic status.*