**SR-5 - Cultural Heritage**

OBJECTIVES

1. To explore, investigate, and identify the cultural/lifeways connections that improve human resilience due to the vulnerability of the land and water of the estuary.
2. To protect the rich cultural lifeways that are connected to the natural resources of the BTES.
3. To educate about the historical interaction of BTES residents and the estuary’s resources through active research projects that use maps, film, photos, documentaries, oral histories, and other techniques that will document this interaction to preserve the cultural aspects of the region.
4. To promote a demand for information that highlights the uniqueness of our cultural heritage through creating and supporting events that attract the attention of scholars, students, and a public audience for the endangered cultural resources nurtured in the BTES. Greater awareness of the way the lifestyles and unique historical traditions of the BTES are a living classroom that demonstrate the interaction between the region’s natural and cultural resources.
5. To support the complex dynamics of transition through the preservation and memorialization of community histories when those communities must transition from their traditional lands due to coastal land loss or ecological disasters.
6. To prepare communities to adapt to new coastal lands as successful restoration practices and the natural cycle of delta lob shifting re-shapes the estuary.

BACKGROUND/MAJOR ISSUES

This action plan will develop and support a series of activities which protect, interpret, and educate the public about the cultural richness of the BTES while emphasizing the stewardship of resources for future generations. These proposed activities, sponsored by existing culturally-related organizations, will enhance ongoing cultural awareness efforts, enhance pride in the region, and invite others to visit, study, and participate in our unique and culturally significant events.

Because of the strong ties between the cultural heritage of the BTES and the area’s natural resources, the cultural traditions and unique lifestyles of the estuary are threatened as the overall quality of the estuary is diminished. Southern Louisiana has a strong multi-cultural heritage of history, food, music, language, folklore and lifestyles, all clearly related to the beauty, mystique and richness of the natural resources of the area. Sixty years ago, this was an area characterized by large families, faith, neighbors who stuck together, and people who bartered for food and goods. People depended upon the land and the water for their livelihood.

With the discovery of oil and the changes in industry, many people are no longer directly dependent upon the "land" for their income and do not engage in traditional "ways of doing things" on a full-time basis. Still, many families are engaged in hunting, fishing, shrimping, or crabbing for all or part of their livelihood, just like their ancestors, and even more people use these resources for recreation. It is obvious that to maintain this historical tie to the land, we must sustain and maintain the estuary system to a productive level that can support the socio-economics and recreational use by coastal communities and the associated culture(s) that have been a part of the region’s economic life for, in many cases, more than ten generations. Further, we must also look carefully at how cultural and industrial use contributed to the degradation of this area's resources and find ways to generate stewardship of the estuary using our rich heritage. As one member stated, "People need roots that tie them to their culture and wings that allow them to move forward."

Nationally, there has been a consistently incorrect expectation that the coastal estuaries are sustainable. Perhaps that was the case in the mid-1990s. And perhaps that is true for certain areas of this geographic province. But as coastal land loss has already decimated many historic communities of the estuary, the role of BTNEP to preserve the stories and oral traditions of this region has become even more essential. We are experiencing a population shift as evidenced by census data. Social services and infrastructure are diminishing. It is only a matter of time before people must resettle to a new location. It is common knowledge that our coast is one storm away from a catastrophic loss of several communities, such as those lying closest to the Gulf of Mexico.

Further, in coastal Louisiana, subsidence and sea level rise combine to create one of the highest rates of relative sea level and coastal land loss ever measured on the planet. This relative sea level rise has an acute effect on coastal communities in BTES, particularly those made up of indigenous peoples and historical communities that are intricately tied to their surrounding aquatic habitats like the many underserved, underrepresented, and Native communities that exist in the BTES. As relative sea level rise changes the environment, affecting the land, resources, and livelihoods in the communities that make the coast their home, the number of individual at risk increases exponentially. Many at risk BTES communities and their citizens deal with this and other environmental changes in their ecosystem-dependent livelihood on a daily basis. For more than two centuries, these wetland inhabitants have adapted and continue to try to mitigate these changes in order to continue to thrive in their coastal homeland. However, the changes are becoming increasingly severe so that modifications in coastal existence become more and more challenging. It is valuable, therefore, to maintain; we must protect the cultural/lifeways and traditional ecological knowledges.

However, adapting to the risk that these BTES communities experience is their collective and individual resiliency and their inherent ability to deal with environmental change. This adaptive capacity can come from both the environment and the people. For example, many communities in the region’s bayou-based communities plant food crops instead of relying on grocery stores. In addition, community members often take it upon themselves to repair the landscape through placement of rocks or small levees and/or elevating their homes. Further, many BTES communities have close social networks stemming from familial connections and ancestral lands. Like other tightly knit communities (gemeinschaft) such as the Amish, the members of these communities look after one another, providing help and resources to other members of the community when needed. All of these community traits contribute to the ability to adapt and to mitigate to the environmental hazards, however, as the community is diminished, their existence becomes more and more tenuous.

The adaptive capacity of these communities has been honed over many generations of living and working in this dynamic and ever changing environment. Consequently, the regional geography and geology, particularly the health of barrier islands, breadth of protective marshes and swamps, and the ecological integration and maintenance of the natural levees often promote or add to the overall resilience of their community. Resilience emerges from local knowledge and informed hazard mitigation planning from local government. Informed planning comes from a blending, or integration, of local knowledge and science. Since this local knowledge is the basis for how these people interact and depend upon the land and the water for their livelihood and recreation, this information is at the heart of the region’s cultural heritage. Therefore, by integrating science with local knowledge to inform hazard mitigation and restoration planning, we are promoting and enhancing sustainability and resiliency by leveraging the rich cultural heritage that exists in the BTES. Systematic methods are being developed to best integrate science and traditional local knowledge. BTNEP can utilize aspects of these methods to effectively promote the region’s resiliency through its cultural heritage and better understand the area’s environmental subtleties through the individuals who live and work in the area daily. Moreover, as Louisiana Sea Grant is a BTNEP partner their staff could help facilitate education and outreach activities associated with this plan by implementing the latest developments in research associated with traditional ecological knowledge. This approach could easily serve as a template for many other National Estuary Program’s ability to advance the understanding of their citizens’ adaptive capacity and each coastal community’s understanding of resiliency.

Many opportunities exist to highlight a linkage between the environment and the culture of the BTES. Largescale agency projects, collegiate academic research, parish libraries, regional schools, and summer camps offer the most logical means to organize and publicize culturally-based activities. Each has a number of resources, including collections, archives, film and others, which could form the basis for developing activities. In addition, the schools and locally-based cultural organizations (i.e., the National Park Service, the Nicholls Center for Bayou Studies, historical and genealogical societies, arts councils, and crafts guilds) could also organize activities such as art shows or photography exhibits in local museums, malls, or festivals and other community events.

Also, numerous existing activities, such as fairs, festivals, Pow-wows, dances, and other special events could be utilized to highlight the important relationship between the environment and the culture. Numerous historical and archeological sites and landscapes exist in the BTES, which could be the focus of research, preservation and special events through a framework based on traditional ecological knowledge. Finally, state agencies such as the Louisiana Historical Society and the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism could provide valuable support in organizing and publicizing activities. In addition, LPB and Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, or other outlets that can assist in attracting professional/amateur documentary film makers and photographers to document these activities.

SHORT DESCRIPTION

This action plan (SR-5) calls for several distinct components that support and leverage the partners’ existing activities:

* Create a Cultural/lifeways Heritage Action Plan Team.
* Explore gaps in knowledges and avenues to improve human resilience.
* Utilize the BTNEP MC to explore gaps in knowledges and avenues to improve human resilience.
* Develop tie-ins with local, regional, and international festivals to broadcast the cultural uniqueness, significance, and joie de vivre of the BTES.
* Encourage each participating organization within the coalition host at least one annual event dedicated to the stewardship of the estuary or has a component of stewardship in their event.
* Develop a cultural/history curriculum.
* Host a set of annual estuary related cultural events, and invite the organizers of these events to the BTNEP MC to make sure that they understand that they are part of a larger process and a larger effort to preserve cultural heritage.
* Host volunteers and educational groups to preserve the wealth of folk-ways and traditions as well as to attract visitors from all over the world who are interested in learning, preserving, and participating in our unique cultural practices.
* Develop a manual to act as a resource guide for creating stewardship of culture and the estuary.
* Compile and share information.
* Create best principles for mitigation and adaptation strategies for cultures and communities.

This action plans calls for the coordination of many groups to realize the objectives and develop the components suggested. The groups forming this team are represented in the basin. This is consistent with the grassroots approach taken by the CCMP.

LEAD AND SUPPORT IMPLEMENTERS

Lead implementers will include parish libraries, local and parish historical societies and museums, BTES schools, the NPS and Cultural Resources Climate Change Strategy, The Nicholls Center for Bayou Studies, Louisiana Sea Grant, the Lowlanders Center, universities, genealogical societies, arts councils, tourist commissions, local and regional governments and other individuals and organizations presently involved in culturally-based activities. The support implementer for this action will be the BTNEP MC and its Program Office.

TIMELINES AND/OR MILESTONE

Immediately hold meetings with libraries, educators, museums, and cultural ambassadors to provide continued support for objectives, as well as brainstorm new goals.

Short-term plans for this action focus on establishing Action Plan Teams of cultural organizations, which could include the Lead and Support Team Implementers, with support from others, to educate and inform citizens, explore funding sources, and create a cultural/environmental manual. Specific plans could include the following:

* Invite parish library directors and other organizations to an informational meeting about CCMP at the BTNEP Program.
* Conduct meetings to explore issues and plan activities (Program Office/ libraries, National Parks.
* Establish a team to advance objectives.
* Explore funding sources and prepare grant applications.
* Maintain online calendar with a schedule of activities.
* Create online resources.

Medium-term plans call for:

* Encourage each participating organization to host at least one event dedicated to the stewardship of the estuary.
* Partner with state and federal agencies with access to the public to produce and create interpretive signage about folkways and natural and cultural resources throughout the BTES.
* Develop campaign slogan(s) to encourage preservation of the BTES and encourage local professionals, such as local artists to become active stewards of the Program
* Initiate oral history/storytelling projects that focus on local knowledge transfer (shrimper, oystermen, businessmen, boat builders, market hunters, cattlemen, duck carvers, net makers, former cannery workers, recreation guides, crabbers, seafood dealers, retired trappers, and those surviving individuals whose first language is French).
* Work to create updated films on issues facing the estuary.
* Hold small events and enrichment workshops such as boatbuilding, carving, music, food, etc. in conjunction with partners.
* Support research related to culture and ecosystem.

Long-term plans call for the coalition to expand and maintain an awareness of the role of the BTES culture in preserving the estuary. These activities may include:

* Develop a volunteer travel program for adults and family to come to learn about the BTES.
* Support “Immersion” programs.
* Help support eco-tourism/eco-adventures throughout the BTES that enable both locals and visitors to immerse themselves.
* Support a cultural history curriculum.
* Establish tie-ins with festivals such as the Jazz and Heritage Festival, Festival Internationale, the annual T-Bois Blues festival, Swamp Stomp and/or similar type events as part of the BTNEP outreach.
* Create a best principles document for cultural resources.

POSSIBLE RANGE OF COSTS AND SOURCES OF FUNDING

Range of cost:

Total Funding Necessary (Annually): $30,000-$ 100,000

Sources of funding:

1. Local, State, Federal, Industry, Institutional, Non-Governmental Organizations, and Private
2. Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary Foundation and its partners.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The monitoring strategies are intended to serve as mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of projects implemented under the action plans. These strategies should only be used as a guide, not as a requirement. It must be recognized that the monitoring strategies will be expensive to implement and that, because all levels of government and much of the private sector currently have severe funding restraints, they may not be affordable without significant modification. The monitoring strategies do not override or replace project monitoring that would be done by an agency related to specific agency-sponsored projects.

Possible Data Gathered

1. Quarterly reports of activities to the BTMC

2. Meetings and activities documents related to Cultural Heritage in the BTES

3. Regularly reports to EPA

Monitoring

1. Parties Responsible – The Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP) Management Conference and its Program Office are the parties responsible for monitoring.

2. Timetables for Gathering Data – The Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP) Management Conference could report (quarterly).

3. How Data is Shared – All program activities are on the BTNEP website, partner websites, and/or social media outlets.

4. Possible Data Gaps – The BTNEP MC will determine possible data gaps.

5. Additional Funding is always needed.