NATIVE PLANT
Production Facility

PROJECT STATUS

Project Year: 2009 - Present
Status: Ongoing
Category: Restoration
Location: Nicholls State University Farm
Project Partners: Nicholls State University, Shell Oil Company, MOSAIC, LLC

BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM ADDRESSED

The fastest disappearing landmass on earth is occurring in the Barataria and Terrebonne estuaries. This rapid coastal land loss is indiscriminate in the habitats and landforms being washed away. Often overlooked are the remnant chenier ridges and maritime forests, the "high land," in an otherwise vast expanse of wetlands. These ridges and maritime forests, however, are critically important habitat to the millions of Neotropical migratory birds that pass through each spring and fall along the Mississippi Flyway. Without these ridges and maritime forests and the food and protection their trees afford, far fewer birds could be supported along this critically important migration route.

Restoring and reforesting ridges and maritime forests for the migrating and resident has become an increasing priority as it serves to protect the surrounding wetlands and infrastructure from the effects of storm surge, as well. BTNEP has been at the forefront of ridge restoration since the late 1990's, collaborating with partners on the creation of the Fourchon Maritime Forest Ridge and Marsh Restoration project and with bird experts in the selection of a suite of native woody species beneficial to the migrating birds. BTNEP collects native seed from local areas prone to periodic salt water intrusions or maritime influence with the expectation that the seeds and trees will exhibit a higher tolerance to the saline soils and conditions found in the restoration areas the seed has been selected for. As a result of the Fourchon ridge restoration project and the ever expansion of our Volunteer Program, BTNEP's Coastal Restoration Native Planting Program has expanded to meet these needs and to increase our restoration planting footprint within the region.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

BTNEP's Coastal Restoration Native Planting Program has expanded through the years as our Volunteer Program has grown. This growth has allowed the program to expand its restoration footprint throughout the estuaries. The BTNEP shadehouse allows the program to collect native seed, pot, and grow out woody species for ridge and upland plantings beneficial to Neotropical migratory birds utilizing the Mississippi Flyway each spring and fall.

In 2014, BTNEP added a greenhouse to our facility that allowed us expand our suite of native plants we use in our vegetative restoration projects. Black mangrove is an important woody species used to create habitat for fish and nesting material for birds such as the brown pelican as well as being an important species for binding soil in a salt water marsh. Adding the greenhouse provides the protection from the occasional south Louisiana cold snap that can kill the growing seedlings. Most of the plants we grow can be planted after one growing season, but the black mangrove benefits from an additional growing season to increase the root mass aiding its establishment in higher wave energy environments. Overwinter protection is important for growing dune species such as railroad vine and beach morning-glory as they are very susceptible to the cold. Adding a greenhouse allows us to grow our grasses all winter long, even increasing their number through division. Without the greenhouse, the grasses dieback over the winter and take longer to establish for spring plantings.

Overall, the Native Plant Production Facility provides an educational opportunity to the hundreds of volunteers that help at the farm each year. BTNEP receives volunteers from all over the country interested in understanding Louisiana's coastal land loss and willing to help us staunch its growth. The volunteers provide the program with the manpower to pot thousands of plants that the program utilizes in our coastal restoration plantings. Volunteers leave not only with an understanding of how plants are utilized in our restoration efforts, but also the reason why saving this unique economic, environmental, and culturally important area is so important to the entire nation.

CCMP ACTION ITEMS ADDRESSED

EM = Ecological Management, SR = Sustained Recognition and Citizen Involvement

EM-6: Shoreline Stabilization, Induced Sediment Deposition, and Living Shorelines

EM-15: Protection and Enhancement of Native Biological Resources

SR-4: Public Engagement

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