

The 2015 Louisiana Governor's Race
WHAT THE CANDIDATES ARE SAYING ABOUT COASTAL RESTORATION
Part 3 – Advancing River Diversions as Critical Projects

About the Coastal Issues Forum

Coastal restoration is one of the most important issues facing our state. To learn how our next governor plans to deal with the challenges and opportunities related to coastal land loss, the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana and [27 partner groups](#) sponsored a Coastal Candidate Forum on August 18, 2015 at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, La. The full 90-minute forum was rebroadcast on [five television and six radio stations across the state](#) and is [available for streaming online](#). Participating in the forum were all four gubernatorial candidates: Public Service Commissioner Scott Angelle, Lieutenant Governor Jay Dardenne, State Representative John Bel Edwards and U.S. Senator David Vitter. Excerpts from the forum are provided only for the final two candidates, Rep. Edwards and Sen. Vitter.

Question from Pierre Connor, on behalf of Dickie Brennan, Owner and Managing Partner, Dickie Brennan and Company:

“We in Louisiana are blessed with bountiful fisheries and wildlife. Louisiana leads the nation in production of shrimp, oysters, crabs and crawfish. Nearly one-third of the domestic seafood consumed in the contiguous U.S. comes from our waters. Millions of Louisianians and visitors enjoy sport fishing and duck hunting, generating significant revenues. The long-term future of our fisheries and our ducks is tied to the future of our coast, our vibrant wetlands. As marshes fragment and disappear, as coastal islands sink, we lose the habitats that support the fish and wildlife that buoy our economy and represent our traditional way of life. The restoration projects that will be critical to the long-term future of coastal habitats, especially diversions of water and sediment which are the center of the state master plan, will cause changes to an already changing landscape...making fishing better in some places, more challenging in others in the short term.

“As governor, how would you advance river diversions as critical projects?”

Rep. John Bel Edwards Responds:

“Simply put, diversions are the backbone, the central component of the coastal restoration master plan, because it is the loss of sediment replenishment from the Mississippi River that is causing most of the land loss. And there is going to be a fear of the unknown. You’ve got recreational and commercial fishing interests that have a real concern. And that’s why we have to absolutely apply the very best science, whether it is modeling, analysis, engineering, design, construction. We’ve got to have the best possible cost-benefit analysis with an emphasis on the socio-economic factors. We’ve got to acknowledge that there’s a greater good to be served even though there may be temporary consequences and inconveniences that we would all rather not have to endure. We have to employ mitigation projects simultaneously with the restoration projects, like diversions, in order to make sure we minimize those consequences. And we have to clearly understand that this is a long-term approach to restoration that ultimately protects and preserves our way of life. It has to be sufficient to overcome the rising sea levels and subsidence, and we also have to understand that diversions are going to be permanent. We can overcome a lot of the opposition, I think, if we will have flexibility in operations of the diversions. And

we can do this by pulsing the diversion flow so that we actually divert more water when there's the highest concentrations of sediment in it. We've [had] good result[s] from the Bonne-Carre Spillway which since the 1930s has only been opened once a decade on average, and it has produced six feet in some places of elevated land mass. So we know that this will work if it is properly done. We have to use diversion and dredging in tandem with one another to maximize the effectiveness and to decrease the time necessary to achieve the beneficial results. As your governor, I will insist that we faithfully implement the coastal restoration master plan by approaching diversions as I've just outlined."

U.S. Senator Vitter Responds:

"Pierre, I am really glad y'all asked this question because of all the sorts of projects out there, this is going to be the most difficult, the most controversial, because it has the most negative impacts, and so we need to face it head on. And those negative impacts are real, and we need to recognize the potential impacts. I mean, we all value our fisheries – that's what we are trying to preserve and enhance in terms of this whole coastal discussion. And folks tell us, like U.S. Fish and Wildlife, [that] 70 percent of the commercial seafood harvested in the Gulf comes from off Louisiana; it's enormously important. Our own [Louisiana Department of] Wildlife and Fisheries said that last year was one of the most productive in our history in terms of shrimp and crabs. And oysters on private leases are potentially getting an all-time high [harvest]. So that's very real, and the possible negative impacts are very real, and we need to deal with that. I think fundamentally you deal with it in two ways. [First,] everything, everything, everything needs to be science-based. As I said before, we cannot deviate from that, and we can't just play politics with this stuff. It needs to be grounded in sound science. And part of that sound science is measuring and learning and tweaking as you go along. You know the science isn't just up front and then you do a project and never look back; you measure and monitor and tweak as you go along. And secondly, the other big part of that is engaging very proactively, very early on with all of the stakeholders, including those folks from fisheries, and making sure you mitigate those disruptions to the greatest extent possible. And those folks don't just want to check, they want to preserve their livelihood, they want to preserve their way of life, and you need to be open to make sure there are ways to do that, to absolutely the greatest extent possible."

For more information about the Coastal Issues Forum, Contact:

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