



COLLECTIVE CONNECTIVENESS:

116th Congress Testimony
United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
House Committee on Natural Resources
Chairman Raúl M. Grijalva ([AZ-3](#))

Chairman Jared Huffman
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife

“Healthy Oceans and Healthy Economies:
The State of Our Oceans in the 21st Century”

Written Testimony: Angela M. Chalk, MSHCM

FEBRUARY 7, 2019
HEALTHY COMMUNITY SERVICES
New Orleans, Orleans Parish, Louisiana



Contents

Introduction..... 2

Effects of Land Loss 3

The Work of Community Organizations 3

Support and Resources 5

Restoration Efforts 5

Conclusion 6

Appendix 1..... 7

Introduction

As I begin this written testimony, I wish to state that I am honored and privileged to come before this body of the United States House of Representatives. My testimony before the Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife is truthful.

I come before this subcommittee, proud to represent the people of the Great State of Louisiana and provide testimony to our waterways. I will speak to the effects of land loss; the work being done by community organizations; support and resources as well as current restoration efforts

My work in the community of engaging vulnerable populations for the past 14 years has been both educational and enlightening. The passion to understand in detail, the consequences, of climate change, sea level rise, urban water management and food insecurity drives my commitment to help be that, change agent of people's behavior. I contend that only through, true, community engagement, education and outreach that residents are better able to understand the environmental factors that causes climate change, sea level rise and the actions that can be taken to adapt to those changes.

In the past year, I've participated with the [LA SAFE](#) (LA Strategic Adaptation for Future Environments). (1) As a 'table facilitator' to explain the participatory process to residents, it became evident, that while people may not have been able to explain the science of these environmental changes, those changes had been gradually occurring for the past 50 years. Residents of both the rural and urban communities had been living this reality. Residents now had the opportunity to be actively engaged and make decisions about the future of coastal Southeast Louisiana. The common thread was the "collective connectiveness" of faith, family, food, culture and heritage. These changes were and remain real. Residents of Louisiana live these environmental changes daily.

Finally, my participation in this process of understanding the effects of climate change is not abstract. I am a fourth generation New Orleanian. I am the beneficiary of the vast natural resources this state offers. Therefore, it is incumbent upon me to help protect and preserve the waterways of Louisiana. This is not solely for my benefit but, for the benefit the residents of 31 states that share the [Mississippi River water shed](#). (2), (3, Map)



Effects of Land Loss

Vanishing Communities/Lost of Cultural Norms

The science demonstrates that coastal [Louisiana](#) has had significant land lost, in the past 50 years. (1) However, the science doesn't demonstrate the value of the communities that have literally been swallowed by the Gulf of Mexico. As I write this testimony, I know that the residents of [Isle de Jean Charles, LA](#), despite restoration efforts, will have to relocate to higher ground, more inland. The cause sea level rise. (4) This is not an isolated event.

St. James Church, originally known as St. Jacques de Cabahanoce Church dates to 1764 and is the "First Acadian Coast". This is the first church of the first Acadian exiles. Cabahanoce is its Indigenous name, meaning "where the wild ducks roost". (5)

The ancestral burial space at St. James Cemetary is completely submerged in the Mississippi River. If one thinks, that is awful, visualize an [oil/gas line](#) that is directly above this sacred space. (6) Can anyone begin to imagine not being able to visit the final resting place of relatives?

The question then becomes what happens to the history of these communities, their social and spiritual "collective connectiveness" to their homes. How should one prepare to lose their cultural significance and heritage to the effects of land loss?

The Work of Community Organizations

Experiences

I have enjoyed many experiences but. I salute the ordinary people doing extraordinary tasks and who advocate for more resilient communities. We each organize around common goals and objectives. We know that time is crucial to the work we've committed ourselves. I consider myself to be in great company:

NAME	ORGANIZATION	PARISH
Collette Pichon Battle	Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy	St. Tammany Parish, LA
Bette Billiot	Houma Nation	Terrebonne Parish, LA
Sharon Foret	Bayou Interfaith Shared Community Organizing	Lafourche Parish, LA
Jonathan Foret	South LA Center for the Arts	Lafourche Parish, LA
Bri Foster	Greater New Orleans Housing Alliance	Orleans Parish, LA

NAME	ORGANIZATION	PARISH
Ivy Mathieu	Community Advocate	St. John the Baptist Parish, LA
Corey Miller	Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana	Jefferson Parish, LA
Darilyn Demolle Turner	Zion Travelers Coop Center	Plaquemines Parish, LA
Katrina Williams	Coastal Communities Consulting	Jefferson Parish, LA

In urban communities increased rainfall in shorter amounts of time overwhelms the current drainage capacity of New Orleans. However increased education through community engagement and outreach efforts, have changed the behaviors of residents. For example, Healthy Community Services have provided workshops and trainings for residents to learn how to implement green infrastructure interventions. The projects in the 7th collectively harvest, detain or retain approximately 2000 gallons of water.

This work would not have tangible results without “collective connectiveness” Our organizations work to be inclusive of all residents regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or social-economic status and to be a voice for vulnerable populations.

Youth Involvement

Again, time is crucial. That is why, it is imperative for our youth to understand the cost to be paid, if this work is left undone. Just as recently as Super Bowl LIII, the youth of coastal Louisiana brought national attention to land loss and the urgency at which a resolution must be achieved. (7) Young people spoke out using primetime and social media platforms. [#Restore the Coast](#)



Support and Resources

Philanthropic Resources

In this testimony, I must acknowledge the many philanthropic organizations, government agencies, public private partnerships that provide the resources and technical support that help community organizations, put forth this work.

Because of this support, I've been able to experience the marshes of Southeast Louisiana by boat to see firsthand, the diversion of the Mississippi River which helps to rebuild land; by air, to view the point at which the river meets the Gulf of Mexico or to view the protection levee which helps safeguards the City of New Orleans from storm surge and; by land, to hear the voices of residents that now feel empowered to make informed decisions about the effects of climate change.

Restoration Efforts

Reclaiming Land/Projects

[Hope](#) is defined by Webster as a “desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment.” Therefore, it is my hope for humanity to understand that there is no amount of money, technology or engineering that can compete with the forces of nature.

As a society, we can however, integrate technology, science and the experiences of local residents to help reduce the effects of climate change, sea level rise. In New Orleans the Bayou Bienvenue [wetlands](#) are being revitalized by the planting cypress tree seedlings. (8) The cost of a cypress tree seedling is approximately \$1.59. “[Coastal wetlands](#) can provide critical protection against incoming hurricane storm surges. The traditional rule of thumb: each 2.7 miles of marsh knocks down the storm surge by 1 foot.” (9)



To further the restoration of land loss, organizations such as [Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana](#) are recycling oyster shells to reclaim the land. (10) “CRCL’s [Oyster Shell Recycling Program](#) collects shell from New Orleans-area restaurants and uses that shell to restore oyster reefs that help protect Louisiana’s eroding coast line. Launched in June 2014, this is the first program of its kind in Louisiana, and it has collected thousands of tons of oyster shell.” (11)

When I speak of “collective connectiveness,” each year, “[The New Orleans Christmas Tree Recycling Program](#), (12) collects those old Christmas trees and strategically drops bundles of them into the wetlands in [Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge](#). These trees create wave breaks and trap sediment, producing new marsh habitat that supports growth of native grasses. Over the years, the program has replenished approximately 175 acres of wetlands in Bayou Sauvage.” The power of the people in a regain has incrementally created a massive change in coastal restoration efforts.

Conclusion

I hope that I’ve demonstrated to this committee the value of “collective connectiveness.” As each of you move forward with the decision-making process, remember that whether you reside to the west or east of the Mississippi River; Colorado or Pennsylvania, we share the precious space of this waterway, “the Great River”. The [Mississippi River](#) and its tributaries drains 41% of the contiguous United States and 15% of North America. (3)

In closing, I’d like to thank my family, friends and neighbors, for providing support, love and encouragement on this journey. Most importantly, the people who support me to express my voice, Liz Williams Russell, Rachel Sanderson, Caressa Chester and Klie Kliebert of the Foundation for Louisiana.

Again, Thank You for this opportunity to come before this body and speak the truth of this nation’s greatest waterway.

Respectfully,

Angela M. Chalk, MSHCM
Executive Director
Healthy Community Services
New Orleans, Orleans Parish, Louisiana

Appendix 1

Sources

1. (LA Coastal Protection Restoration Authority, 2019)
2. (US Department of Interior, 2018)
3. (Environmental Protection Agency, 2019)
4. (LA Coastal Protection Restoration Authority, 2019)
5. (DeLuca, 2019)
6. (Historic Churches of Acadiana, 2018)
7. (Restore the Delta, 2019)
8. (Global Green New Orleans, 2017)
9. (Jeffrey Masters, 2012)
10. (Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, 2019)
11. (Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, 2019)
12. (Restore the Mississippi River Delta, 2016)