

NATURALIST NEWSLETTER

Louisiana Master Naturalist Greater New Orleans

A Message from our President

LMNGNO Springtime activities are filling up the calendar on Track it Forward. This is a great time to find a new activity to try as a volunteer. There are activities from community organizations with which we partner - like Sankofa Wetlands and Northlake Nature Center, and activities generated by members that only run if we participate.

I guarantee that you will always be welcome even if you know no one else at the event or feel as though you don't know enough about the subject to contribute. We are all at various stages of learning about Louisiana natural history; but we are all committed to helping others learn along with us.

I want to express my deep appreciation to the faithful volunteers who contribute. Our members have already logged 714 volunteer hours since January 1, 2021.

The officers, board members, and committee chairs dedicate many hours each year to various administrative tasks essential to maintaining a well-run organization. Our members show up at events to represent us to explain artifacts to the public, or record citizen science data on a phenology trail. Others work with school groups at Lake Pontchartrain to investigate the impact of microplastics on native flora and fauna.

Newsletter editors and contributors; workshop coordinators, educators, leaders, and reflection readers; website designers, photographers, and social media posters – the list is long and ALL of you who contribute are vital to our organization. -Janell Simpson

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Vireo griseus

white eyed vireo

Photo by Bill Van der Meer

Volunteer Opportunities:

Visit the "Events" calendar in **Track It Forward** for upcoming functions in your area

Winner of the The Percy Viosca Award

Byron Almquist was selected by the LMNGNO Board of Directors for the 2021 Percy Viosca award to honor his lifelong dedication to Louisiana Natural History. Not only is Byron a knowledgeable naturalist, but he is also enthusiastic about sharing his knowledge with others.

He has led many naturalists on canoe trips in the local swamps, parks and bayous. He spent the early months of 2020 studying trees in public areas. When it was possible to assemble a small group, he began leading groups around parks to identify trees in green spaces. His tree walks continue today and have inspired a "Camphor Eradication Project" on Scout Island in City Park.

But just who was Paul Percy Viosca Jr. and what makes an award bearing his name such a distinction among naturalists? Born in New Orleans on June 24, 1892, Viosca was a preeminent naturalist of his day.

After earning his master's of science degree, he taught at Tulane through 1916, after which he set up the Southern Biological Supply Company. His company supplied specimens of crayfish and other aquatic life for research and commercial use. Viosca's publications, about life in the swamps and marshes of Louisiana, proved invaluable for posterity.

By the end of his life, his remarkable contributions were acknowledged, earning him the title "Mr. Marine Biologist, the dean of Louisiana biologists". -Janell S. and Bill V.



Byron Almquist
Photo by Bob Thomas

Camphor Wars at Scout Island: Another Volunteer Opportunity

Equipped with various implements of destruction, an army of naturalist volunteers have made significant progress in the eradication of Camphor trees on the Scout Island segment of City Park New Orleans. Byron Almquist, who has been coordinating these three hour events held on the third Saturday of every month, pointed out that the invasive Camphor may very well be the most dominant tree on Scout Island.

Reducing or otherwise eradicating the species involves pulling, lopping, or cross cutting various stages of tree growth and followed by applications of “brush killer” solution. The benefit of Camphor control is to allow native vegetation to germinate and thrive, which the camphors are now preventing.

Tyler Havens is the full time coordinator, on the staff of City Park who directs volunteer efforts and provides all of the tools and material. Tyler works with all types of groups including corporate groups, college, high school, local clubs/organizations, etc. He has a group of a few experienced volunteers who come in on “Tallow Tuesdays” and work from 9-12 to help eradicate Chinese Tallow trees.

Questions or requests for more information may directed to Byron Almquist at byron@canoeandtrail.com or Tyler Havens, who can be reached at thavens@nocp.org



Anxious to break free from COVID restrictions LMNGNO members and folks from other organizations gather on a crisp February morning to fight the Camphors

Photo by Tyler Havens



Cinnamomum camphora
camphor

Photo by Bill Van der Meer

Seminars:

Wednesday seminars are now held on the first Wednesday of each month. The topics and speakers for the next several months are:

May 5

James Beck

Common Mosquitoes of Southeast Louisiana

June 2

Franziska (Fran) Trautmann: Glass Half Full: Glass Recycling and Re-use

July 2,

To Be Announced

August 4

Children's Museum
Julia Bland

PO - 169, A Blossoming Case Study in Shoreline Stabilization and Marsh Creation

Much has been researched, debated and covered by media outlets regarding the fragile nature of our rapidly disappearing Louisiana coastline and marshlands. Concurrent or proposed mitigation strategies such as beach replenishment, sediment diversions, flood protection levees, marsh restoration and the MRGO closure are either completed, ongoing, or are in the pipeline.

A unique scenario and of particular concern to the city of New Orleans and shoreline communities along the Lake Pontchartrain Basin involves an isthmus that separates lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne.

Known as the New Orleans East Landbridge, east and west bound highway 90 runs along its spine. Upon its thin margins lie the marshes and lagoons that support a large number of wintering waterfowl, herons, egrets, rails and a scattering of homes and marinas. Its greatest near-term importance is its role as a storm surge barrier. This in turn significantly impacts human activity and the fragile ecosystems as we know them.



*UNO Research Vessels tie up on Lake St. Catherine during an April 6th workshop
Photo by Bill Van der Meer*

A recent workshop and marshlands field trip onto Lake St. Catherine was sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) and the Mississippi River Delta Coalition (MRDC). Additional support and input for the project was provided by the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) and University of New Orleans Pontchartrain Institute for Environmental Sciences (UNO-PIES).

PO-169, continued

To underscore the significance of this natural barrier, David Muth of the NWF put it this way: *"It is critically important to hold onto the Landbridge". Its loss will result in saltwater intrusion into the estuary and will kill species up to and including the freshwater lake marsh. And the Gulf of Mexico will be lapping up to the suburbs of Baton Rouge*".

Evidence of shoreline erosion and interior marsh fragmentation in the delta are symptomatic of a combination of contributing factors, not the least of which are land subsidence, and sea level rise. The Landbridge continues to be buffeted by the wind and currents brought on by tropical weather systems and one particularly devastating blow by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Although land subsidence was found to be relatively low on this site, a USGS land change analysis indicated a -0.001% per year interior land loss rate within the 1984-2018 period of analysis. This represents a roughly 300 acre loss.

At first glance this appears to be a very small number compared to the huge amount of land being consumed by the Gulf annually along the entire LA coast. But here on the Landbridge, location is everything. A remnant shoreline scoured out by Katrina and other eroded barriers now offer very little protection from wave energy coming from Lake St. Catherine and the Rigolets Pass.

Enter PO-169. Titled the New Orleans Landbridge Shoreline Stabilization & Marsh Creation Project, the \$25.4 million dollar approved project is designed to selectively restore 254 acres of brackish marsh and stabilize 15,170 linear feet of shoreline.

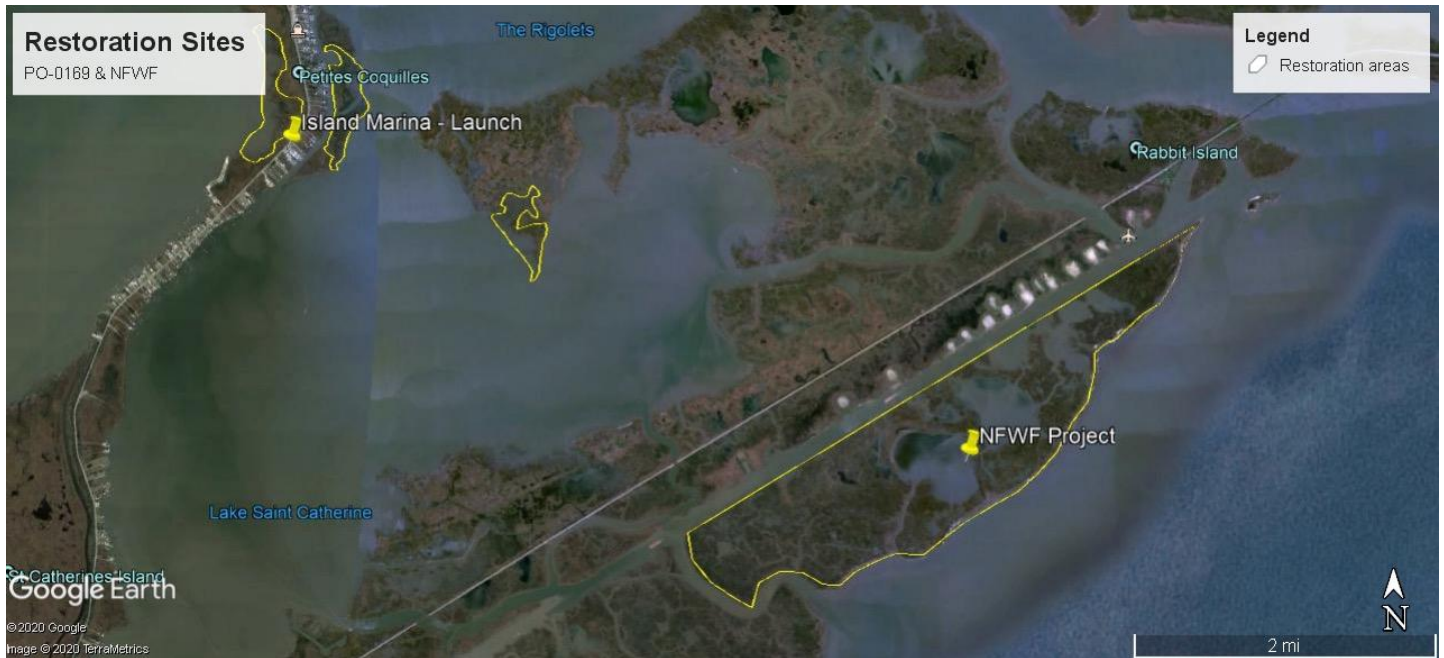
On April 6th and against a backdrop of interpretive lectures provided by Dinah Maygarden of UNO PIES, David Muth of the NWF, our capable UNO boat crews and workshop participants departed Island Marina to observe the marsh sites destined to be restored.

Sturdy research vessels were provided by UNO PIES. Looking out over this seemingly vast body of predominantly open water, it rapidly becomes clear how daunting a task the project engineers at CPRA are about to undertake.



*Dinah Maygarden of UNO-PIES
points out target areas of
planned marsh restoration
Photo by Bill Van der Meer*

PO-169, continued



Target areas of planned marsh restoration and stabilization outlined in yellow - Google Earth image

The targeted marsh sites will be restored by importing approximately 1.3 million cubic yards of material dredged from borrow areas in lakes St. Catherine and Pontchartrain. A raised berm is placed first to hold the sediment in place. Finally, articulated concrete mats will be brought in to stabilize the shorelines.

Interestingly, this project involves an entirely different approach than those provided by land building sediment diversions. As David Muth points out: "Because of its distance from the river there can be no land building sediment to ward off sea level rise. The Landbridge will have to be continually engineered and replenished without (Mississippi River) sediment except to a much smaller extent than diversions can provide".

-Bill Van der Meer

Credit: Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force 2019. New Orleans Landbridge Shoreline Stabilization & Marsh Creation (PO-169). www.LaCoast.gov April 2019



Wanted: Contributing Authors

Anyone interested in sharing information, photos or submitting an article for publication in the LMNGNO newsletter may contact Bill Van der Meer for more information and guidelines. Volunteer hours will apply.

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Volunteer Guides Needed for Nature Tours at the Louisiana Children's Museum

LMNGNO is partnering with the Louisiana Children's Museum to present a program of guided tours for children and their families to explore the natural world on the museum grounds. Since December 2020, a small group of Master Naturalists has been meeting at the museum and planning tours. Langston Hughes Academy students have since participated in trial tours. Hilairie Schackai, who is currently serving as liaison between LMNGNO and the Children's Museum, reports that the museum is now ready to take these nature experiences to the general public.



Master Naturalist volunteers Shubha Nataraj (Fall 2018), N. J. Stanley (Fall 2018), and Rebecca Stilling (Fall 2018) prepare to lead Langston Hughes Academy students on a nature tour at the Louisiana Children's Museum.

They are asking for volunteers to serve in two different capacities:

1. Four volunteers are needed to assist in giving tours on two Saturdays in May – on May 22 and May 29. Volunteers will work two shifts each day, from 9 to 11 a.m. and 1 to 3 p.m. Ideally, these two days would serve as training opportunities for those who would like to give tours in the future.
2. Also in demand are volunteers to give tours on a more regular basis and based on their availability. Ideally, volunteers would cover shifts on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays during the summer – from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. each day, although this is flexible.

Eventually, volunteers will have the option to develop more tours and contribute to their growing collection of display items. Hilairie describes this opportunity as an ideal activity for educators, parents, grandparents, and those who want to share their love of the natural world with young budding naturalists. -Hilairie Schackai

To sign up or have questions answered please contact: Hilairie Schackai at hschackai@gmail.com.