

The Balance Wheel

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Inside This Issue:

President's Message:

News from the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) meeting, Conservation Education Strategies and Teaming with Wildlife (TWW)

National News: Hurricane Katrina: Updates from Louisiana and Alabama

Changing Landscape: A Report from Louisiana

The Call of Duty: Louisiana Department of Fish and Wildlife (LDWF) Search and Rescue Katrina Sets New Benchmark for Alabama Residents

Skill Building:

Maintaining an Open Line of Communication

TWW Update:

Teaming with Wildlife: A Natural Investment

Upcoming Events and Deadlines:

2006 ACI Conference

S.E. Deer Study Group

TWW Coalition Workshop

TWW Fly-In

71st North American Wildlife Conference

Member News:

Chris Chaffin Assumes Conservation Responsibilities

Kathleen Jamison Bids Adieu

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Dave Chanda

Greetings!

This past September I was fortunate enough to represent ACI at the 95th Annual Meeting of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) held in Nashville, Tennessee. I was able to attend several sessions including the Education, Outreach and Diversity Committee meeting. While at this meeting I met with several state directors who expressed their appreciation of ACI's commitment to both the National Conservation Education Strategy and the communications plan surrounding the implementation of the State Wildlife Action Plans. It is very gratifying to know that our organization is held with such high regard. In fact there were several directors who requested that ACI consider moving our annual conference to coincide with either the spring or fall meeting of the IAFWA to enhance ACI participation. Although this may be logistically impossible to coordinate, the idea certainly merits consideration by the membership and I plan to bring it up for discussion at the general membership meeting next summer in Florida.

Both the Conservation Education Strategy and the Teaming with Wildlife communications plan are moving forward. While in Nashville the Education, Outreach and Diversity Committee continued development of the strategy. A chair has been assigned to each of the five goals of the Conservation Education Strategy and they have put together committees of volunteers and advisors to assist in the development of each goal. It is important to stay involved in this work. If you would like to participate please contact Sharon Rushton. Sharon is the Vice-chair of the Education, Outreach and Diversity Committee. Her email is rushtonsr@aol.com.

As for a Teaming with Wildlife update – every state has now submitted its wildlife action plan. Interior Secretary Gale Norton conducted a national press conference on November 2 announcing the submission of these Wildlife Action Plans. “These plans represent a future for conservation in America that is rooted in cooperation and partnership between the federal government and states, tribes, local governments, conservation groups, private landowners and others with a commitment to the health of our land and water, fish and wildlife,” said Norton.

In addition, the IAFWA recently held a Teaming with Wildlife Coalition and Communications Training session in Virginia’s Shenandoah National Park. This training was to serve as a kick-off to IAFWA’s efforts to reinvigorate the Teaming with Wildlife Coalition in support of the state wildlife action plans. Although I was not able to attend, from what I have heard it was an excellent session that provided a whole new suite of skills and resources for strengthening and leveraging state coalitions.

I know everyone is very busy, but I hope you can make time to participate in both of these very important initiatives. These are very exciting times for fish and wildlife management throughout the country, and just as exciting for the communications professionals who work for these agencies and organizations. I hope you will join me and become a major player in both the National Conservation Education Strategy and the communications plan surrounding the implementation of the State Wildlife Action Plans.

I hope you had a great Thanksgiving, and wish each and every one a happy holiday!



NATIONAL NEWS: HURRICANE KATRINA

The eye of Hurricane Katrina made landfall at 6:10 a.m. on Monday, August 29 as a powerful Category 4 storm. The storm surge soon breached the levee system that protects New Orleans from Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi River causing widespread flooding. The storm caused monumental damage to coastal regions of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Hurricane Katrina goes down in the history books as the most destructive and costliest natural disaster in the history of the United States. Following are several articles from states impacted by this massive natural disaster.

A Changing Landscape: Report from Louisiana

By Marianne Burke, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

As Hurricane Katrina moved out of southeast Louisiana, man and beast emerged from their safe havens. The view of surrounding, familiar landscapes was one of massive, brutal destruction. Houses and habitats completely destroyed; roads and rivers unrecognizable; stores and feeding grounds submerged.

Louisiana is no stranger to hurricanes. Through the generations, hurricanes have pounded our coastline, washed away our towns and devastated our natural resources. However, after each storm, Mother Nature has replenished the Sportsman’s Paradise. Some hurricanes took longer to recover from than others, and some left permanent changes on our landscapes. Hurricane Katrina will do both, requiring years for certain species to recover, and forever changing our landscape and coastline.

For the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) fish and wildlife resource impacts and habitat assessment was a primary concern after Katrina. LDWF staff flew over the affected parishes realizing for the first time the full extent of the devastation and the amount of work ahead. Immediately the fisheries and wildlife biologists began making their assessments and recommendations.

Fisheries

The impact of Hurricane Katrina on Louisiana’s fisheries resources was catastrophic, to say the least. Hurricane Katrina made landfall first near Empire, and then crossed the delta into the Breton and Chandeleur sounds to the east. These are areas of shallow-shelf estuarine waters including extensive oyster reefs, large marine and estuarine

beds, and wetlands. Although reconnaissance flights took place at the time of this report and continue to take place, the magnitude of wetland loss or changes in topographic structures that may affect fishing grounds is still unknown.

Debris-laden waterways would present serious problems for our fisheries industry. Trash and refuse deposited by the hurricane over traditional fishing areas would threaten both gear and waterway navigation. Large amounts of debris left in coastal waters would affect shrimp trawlers, boaters, swimmers and beach visitors along the coast.

As biologists continued their assessment of the damaged areas, water quality became an issue. Poor water quality, primarily low dissolved oxygen, is always a major concern when powerful hurricanes cause destruction of this magnitude. Fish, crab, shrimp and oyster resource damages are generally the result of low oxygen and/or sediment overburden. After Hurricane Andrew (1992) Florida and Louisiana experienced massive fish kills from similar conditions. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) have implemented water quality monitoring systems for surface waters in the city of New Orleans and Lake Pontchartrain. DEQ estimated that releases from Hurricane Katrina included two large oil spills (68,000 bbls at Venice and 10,000 bbls at Chalmette), releases from 25 major sewage treatment centers and many smaller ones, as well as runoff from countless fuel storage tanks, households and industrial chemical stores (gasoline, diesel, antifreeze, bleach, human waste, acids, alcohols, etc.). Standard precautionary oyster harvest closures were put in place by the Department of Health and Hospitals prior to Hurricane Katrina. At the time of this printing, no further closures or advisories had been issued for the impacted area.

The Breton and Chandeleur sounds, directly in the path of Katrina, were the most extensive sea grass beds on the Louisiana coast, including turtle grass, shoal grass, manatee grass, widgeon grass and star grass. They provided unique marine habitat along the eastern edge of the Mississippi delta. Lakes Pontchartrain, Catherine, and Borgne were also home to aquatic vegetation, with recent studies of grass beds in Lake Pontchartrain on the increase. However, high wind, wave action, and increased levels of sediment and pollution are expected to drastically affect these beds.

Other areas of great concern in the Gulf of Mexico were the artificial reefs constructed under Louisiana's Artificial Reef Program, which utilizes obsolete oil and gas platforms. In the past, these artificial reefs showed very little movement or damage after large hurricanes such as Ivan and Lili. Inspections have yet to take place since Hurricane Katrina.



Arial view of Chandeleur Island, Louisiana, before Hurricane Katrina. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Geologic Surveyt)

As the days passed, the economic impact to Louisiana's fisheries resources began to surface. Using available data and several independent approaches LDWF staff was able to quantify in economic terms, the estimated losses caused by Katrina. For all commercial species, production loss was estimated in terms of dockside value by assuming that commercial production would be disrupted for varied lengths of time (i.e. six months, 12 months and 24 months). The same approach was used for both commercial and recreational fisheries for estimating retail value of lost sales based on a potential disruption of fishing activities for the same varied lengths of time. Table 1 shows the losses for both commercial and recreational fisheries at dockside and retail value.

Category	Direct Loss of Available Resource	12 Month Potential Production Loss at Dockside	12 Month Potential Production Loss at Retail Level
Crab	N/A	\$ 12,297,617	\$ 81,776,427
Freshwater Fish	N/A	\$ 189,019	\$ 1,256,934
Menhaden	N/A	\$ 14,050,883	\$ 93,435,257
Oysters	\$206,811,000	\$ 44,577,072 *	\$ 296,427,648 *
Saltwater Fish	N/A	\$ 11,836,588	\$ 78,710,687
Shrimp	N/A	\$ 81,054,864	\$ 538,996,879
Recreational Fisheries	N/A	N/A	\$ 199,517,744
Total	\$206,811,000	\$ 164,006,043	\$ 1,290,121,576

* Oyster losses are for two (2) years.

Of all the species in Louisiana's fishing industry, oysters were affected the greatest. For oysters a direct loss of the resource was also estimated by using the stock size before Katrina and previous studies of hurricane-related oyster mortality (from 10 percent after Ivan to 100 percent after Andrew on some of the public oyster grounds). Because of the size and strength of Katrina, it was estimated that there would be a high mortality of oyster resources on both public and private areas due to heavy sediment and vegetative burdens from Bayou Lafourche east to the Louisiana-Mississippi state line. Oysters generally take between two and three years to grow from larvae to market size, therefore a two-year impact to oyster harvest is expected at the minimum.

The recreational fishing industry suffered no less with losses just under \$200 million. This figure is based on retail value in the affected areas for a 12-month period. Recreational fisheries do not have values comparable to dockside values like the commercial sector, so estimates of the retail value were used. These losses reflect only lost sales related to fishing activities. An important fact to point out regarding economic impact to the recreational fishing industry is that approximately 63 percent of the 515 charter and guide vessels registered in Louisiana are registered in those severely impacted parishes.

The value of damaged infrastructure supporting the fishing industry is difficult to quantify. Infrastructure losses are characterized as lost or damaged vessels, docks, ice plants and processing facilities, but also include roads and bridges, trucking, cold storage facilities, boat ramps, launches, marinas, bait and tackle shops. Due to the widespread displacement of local residents, labor shortages may also limit the ability of infrastructure to quickly recover, repair, or rebuild. Some perspective of the dimensions of the damage is suggested by the facts that 28 percent of Louisiana's wholesale/retail seafood dealers are based in the impacted parishes and 42 percent of both the commercial fishers and of the commercial fishing vessels are based in the impacted parishes.

One example of the economic impact Katrina will have on Louisiana's fishing industry is one menhaden plant in Plaquemines Parish. This particular plant was severely impacted by the hurricane. The plant was flooded with several feet of water and the fleet of 11 boats was beached. This company reported approximately 270 displaced personnel, mainly in Plaquemines Parish, and landings of approximately 30 percent of the total Gulf menhaden landings. Using information from the LDWF economic impact study, this company's estimated total economic benefit to Louisiana was \$116 million in retail sales, \$25 million in wages and earnings, and \$17 million in total landings. This one plant could result in a loss to our economy of almost \$158 million.



Aerial view of Chandeleur Island, Louisiana, AFTER Hurricane Katrina. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Geologic Survey)

Wildlife

Katrina didn't stop at the coast with changing our landscapes. Just as our favorite fishing waters were changed, so were the hunting grounds in the impacted areas.

Hunting is a major economic and cultural activity in Louisiana providing jobs and economic benefit to Louisiana and the nation. Hurricane Katrina hit southeast Louisiana with winds in excess of 140 mph and a storm surge in excess of 20 feet. The loss of wildlife habitats and the infrastructure that supports hunting in Louisiana was at best, disastrous.

The major impact of Hurricane Katrina on wildlife habitat and resources occurred in the Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Tammany, Washington and the eastern portions of Tangipahoa parishes. Timber damage was extensive in the two parishes north of Lake Pontchartrain. Aerial surveys estimate a 65 percent loss in Washington Parish and 40 percent loss in St. Tammany Parish of the forest resources that support wildlife populations.

The Pearl River Wildlife Management Area (35,031 acres) suffered extensive timber damage. A once somewhat closed canopy forest now resembles an open, massive 'downed' forest. Timber loss alone on Pearl River WMA could exceed \$27 million. This drastic habitat change will result in significant impacts for the resident and migratory species reliant on this forest structure.

Other WMAs impacted by the storm included Sandy Hollow (3,515 acres), Lake Ramsey (800 acres) and Ben's Creek (13,044 acres) WMAs, but preliminary assessments were still underway. Sandy Hollow WMA is primarily managed for upland game birds.

Based on recent economic studies the total economic impact of hunting in the parishes affected by Katrina is \$151.8 million, with retail sales of \$88.4 million. It is estimated the loss of hunting opportunity in the current season (2005-06) will result in a loss of retail sales totaling \$56.7 million with a total economic loss of \$97.4 million. It is also anticipated that 100 percent of the fur harvest in the affected parishes will be lost for the 2005-06 trapping season. This will result in a loss of \$370,000 in retail sales and \$680,000 in associated total economic impact to Louisiana.

Everything in the path of Hurricane Katrina took a serious hit. The marsh and wetland habitat below Highway 90 was another prime example of Katrina's fury. Preliminary assessments indicate that the 116,000-acre Pass-a-Loutre WMA received widespread damage to the wetlands. This WMA, located on the farthest southeastern tip of Louisiana's coast, received some of the strongest east winds of Katrina. Most, if not all, of the submerged aquatic vegetation and the delta duck potato, both important waterfowl foods, sustained severe wind and saltwater burn. A number of oil spills/releases were also observed on the WMA creating water quality issues and the severity of these spills and the damage assessment to Pass-a-Loutre is underway. Access to the remote facility is a logistical problem for the LDWF staff.

Pointe-aux-Chenes WMA, primarily located in Lafourche Parish also received damage. A significant amount of submerged aquatic vegetation in the three water management areas was removed by wind and wave action, and the facilities received extensive rain and wind damage from the Hurricane Katrina. (Hurricane Rita further compounded the flooding problem.)

Wildlife species research, habitat studies and determining future needs for the impacted parishes will require extensive planning, new management programs and a great deal of recovery work. Forested habitat impacts, both short and long-term, to wildlife species, restoration and management needs, will include broad studies on deer, rabbit, squirrel and turkey in the impacted parishes. Likewise, with marsh and wetland habitat impacts, short and long-term needs will include studies on deer, rabbit, waterfowl and other migratory game.

The estimated cost of recovering, repairing and replenishing these areas is in the millions, and like any natural disaster it is difficult to determine a precise dollar amount. The uniqueness of the hunting grounds, the available species and habitat found in Pearl River WMA and other impacted areas will present challenges to LDWF wildlife staff.

New Landscapes

In the days immediately after Hurricane Katrina, it was difficult to comprehend the devastation left behind. However, through the past few weeks we have gained a better understanding of where we are and what we need.

The potential economic impact from Katrina on both the fisheries and wildlife resources will be difficult for LDWF and the State of Louisiana to handle. But recovery will take place, and the unfamiliar landscapes will become familiar over time. The Sportsman's Paradise will recover, once again.

At the time this issue went to print, the impacts of Hurricane Rita were not completely known. It will be months or years before the full impacts of this storm are fully revealed.

The Call of Duty: LDWF Search and Rescue

By Adam Einck, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

Hurricane Katrina was finally the big one that hit the Big Easy, playing out New Orleans' nightmare scenario. Winds wreaked havoc on the Superdome, which was being used as an emergency shelter, and caused water to gush over the top and eventually through the levee systems that keep New Orleans dry. The flooding that ensued devastated much of the city and surrounding areas.

New Orleans has always known that a category three or stronger hurricane would be no match for their levees, which was a main reason for a mandatory evacuation of people living in the area. However, there were still thousands of people who stayed either because they did not have the means to leave, thought this was another false prediction, or did not want to leave their homes, belongings and pets behind.



Photo courtesy of Louisiana Conservationis

It was estimated that 90 percent of the people in harm's way evacuated before the storm, which still left thousands of people who would need rescuing in the event of flooding. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Enforcement Division agents along with biologists and technicians from the wildlife and fisheries divisions would be the first ones in the water saving people in the event that this worst-case scenario came true.

Calm Before the Storm

Since LDWF enforcement agents are fully trained in water rescue, boat navigation and first response, the Enforcement Division has always been on alert for missions involving water rescue.

"All of our officers have had first-responder training, which is an advanced first aid training," LDWF Enforcement Division Lt. Col. Keith LaCaze said. "In addition, some officers have been trained in coordinating, establishing and running search-and-rescue operations. We also have a dive team and are trained in medical evacuations."

The New Orleans area agents were also victims of the storm and had to evacuate their own homes. One of those agents was Sgt. Glenn Jackson, who lived at Carrollton and Canal and evacuated to Jackson, Mississippi, on the Sunday preceding the storm.

In addition to rescue training, LDWF has more than 300 boats that belong to the Enforcement, Wildlife, Fur and Refuge, Inland and Marine Fisheries divisions and personnel with extensive knowledge of operating boats.

Agents throughout the state were notified on Friday, Aug. 26, before the storm hit, to fuel up and pack food, water, linens and extra clothes. "We (agents) bought ice chests and everything we might need to survive on for four or five days in our vehicles," said Sgt. Michael Kelly, a 19-year veteran with the Enforcement Division from the Minden office. "We also went out and filled up every gas can we could find."

Personnel from other LDWF divisions were also notified over the weekend to be ready just in case the Enforcement Division needed extra people and boats for the rescue missions.

"On Sunday we got extra fuel for our boats," said Jody David, a biologist for 17 years with the Inland Fisheries Division out of Opelousas. "We've always been told in case of emergencies to be ready to go and this one hit us hard."

Katrina Brings Destruction and Flooding to Gulf Coast

After Katrina made landfall on the morning of Monday, Aug. 29, agents from the Shreveport, Monroe, Ferriday and Alexandria areas met at 9 a.m. at Woodworth, which is just south of Alexandria. An hour later they were on their way to Baton Rouge to join the rest of the rescue crew at LDWF headquarters.

"We knew at that point that it was a very serious situation down in the New Orleans area," LaCaze said. "The preliminary flooding and damage had already been reported. We decided at that point to go ahead to New Orleans, and around 1 p.m., we were in route."

LaCaze said the first wave of rescuers included 62 agents and 31 boats. A state trooper and a couple of bridge inspectors escorted them into New Orleans while Katrina was still inflicting damage on the communities they passed along the way. Since this convoy was the first one into New Orleans after the storm, nobody knew if the bridges beyond LaPlace and over Lake Pontchartrain were passable.

The bridge inspectors went over each elevated part of the interstate and bridge first to make sure the rescuers could safely get into New Orleans from that route. "They were the guinea pigs or the canaries in the mineshaft to see if those bridges were safe to pass," LaCaze said.

Meanwhile, the other LDWF divisions were instructing their standby personnel to be in Baton Rouge Tuesday morning to assist with search and rescue efforts. The mission for LDWF's search and rescue personnel was to go into flooded areas with their boats, take people that were stranded and get them to higher ground, where ground transportation would take them to shelters across the state and nation. "We have the boats and off-road equipment to access remote areas," LaCaze said. "Our mission was to get people out of the water."

The Aftermath

Hurricane Katrina delivered a massive blow to the New Orleans area. The wind produced a storm surge that caused Lake Pontchartrain to fill rapidly and thus overwhelm the levee systems. These levee breaches filled New Orleans with water leaving people stranded in their attics, patients and staff at hospitals without electricity and evacuees surrounded by water at the Superdome.

MONDAY, AUG. 29: LDWF Enforcement agents were in the Metairie area at about 2 p.m. and started rescuing people right off Interstate 10. Agents then received a report that a nursing home with about 50 people needed to be evacuated on Power Blvd. While the agents were evacuating the nursing home, Capt. Brian Clark and Sgt. Rachel Zechenelly, who are both from the New Orleans area and lost their homes in the storm, started to find routes that were passable by vehicles to search for boat launch sites.

"We had some areas where we knew we had people to rescue, but we were blocked by water and land," LaCaze said. "If you launched a boat, you could only get so far before hitting land again. Once those routes were determined, we got into those areas where people needed help."

Sgt. Kelley said they tried to focus on areas with the largest populations and the deepest flooding, which was where the levees broke and people had taken to their rooftops to stay out of the water. "We were concentrating on the critical people in attics or up on rooftops," he said.



Photo courtesy of Louisiana Conservationist

Agents met up with the New Orleans Fire Department on the eastern side of the city, which was already under water. They broke into three groups and started bringing people out of the water. "At that point you could go anywhere and find people. The first phase of rescue operations began right there," LaCaze said.

Agents launched boats and saved people from the rising water by bringing them to dry ground on top of interstates throughout the night and into Tuesday morning. "We had to use searchlights because you had power lines hanging in the water and all kinds of other obstructions," LaCaze said. "After the first night, we didn't run nighttime operations because you just couldn't see and the security aspect was a big concern."

TUESDAY, AUG. 30: Starting Tuesday morning and continuing into Wednesday, other LDWF divisions started heading toward New Orleans to join in the search-and-rescue efforts. The Wildlife Division sent down 25 people with 13 boats, Fur and Refuge supplied nine boats and 24 personnel, Inland Fisheries had over 40 people and 30 boats and Marine Fisheries provided about 20 people and five boats. In addition, each division supplied logistical support by bringing much-needed fuel, food, water, radios and various other materials throughout the rescue operations.

"I got there Tuesday morning and went into the Chalmette area," David said. "We rescued people until dark. Most of that was getting people off their roofs and balconies and bringing them back to where we launched our boats." LaCaze said, "By break of day Tuesday, we had rescued 500 or more people at one location and three or four hundred people at two other locations. We had a lot of people massed up on the interstates and every once in a while a military transport would take out 40 or 50 people at a time.

"We had to start using our own trucks for transport because we had to get these people out of the sun. Especially the elderly and sick people," LaCaze added. "We were putting people in the backs of our trucks and taking them to the Superdome until dark."

At that point the rescuers had been working for 36 hours straight. "We were exhausted and our resources were getting depleted, so we had to pull back that night. We crawled back to the National Guard Base in Carville to rest and get something to eat," LaCaze said.

Sgt. Jackson, who was still in Mississippi, was having a hard time getting back to help his fellow citizens of New Orleans. "We had no power Tuesday, so I couldn't call communications or let my rank know I was trying to get in route. The neighborhood I was in had too many downed trees and I didn't have enough fuel to get back to Baton Rouge. I was sitting there biting my nails and became extremely frustrated, not being able to help out right away," he said.

That day other state agencies started arriving to assist in the search and rescue efforts. Those agencies included Texas, Missouri, Ohio, Minnesota, Michigan, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky and Illinois.

WEDNESDAY, AUG. 31: On Wednesday morning the search and rescue teams met in Gonzales to set up the convoy and head back to New Orleans. Their main mission this day was to start evacuating Charity, Tulane and Lindy Boggs hospitals.

They found a place to launch their boats at Perdido and Loyola to start the evacuation of hospitals. They then took those patients to a triage staging area set up by the Shreveport Fire Department in a parking lot on dry ground where patients would be prepared for ambulance transport.

"Evacuating those hospitals was definitely a day's work," Kelley said. "I would say a third of the patients that we evacuated from Tulane were wheelchair bound. We would have to pick those people up in their wheelchairs and put them in our boats. Then we would have to offload them at the staging area."

LaCaze said, "We took out 60 or more patients from Tulane on Wednesday, some of them were stretcher bound so we brought backboards for them."

Ambulances came in and got some of the patients from the staging area, but there were still 50 that got left behind. "It was getting late in the day and we had to put those remaining patients into the back of our trucks and offload them by Causeway Boulevard," LaCaze said.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 1: On Thursday the search and rescue teams again concentrated on evacuating the rest of the hospitals. This was also LaCaze's first day at the command center in Kenner.

"It was controlled pandemonium," LaCaze said about the command center. "We would get all the requests for information and assistance here. Then we would have logistical issues to take care of such as getting fuel and transport to the right places. Then you had a tremendous amount of calls coming in and people coming up to you with special requests, needs and questions."

Sgt. Jackson finally made it to Baton Rouge Thursday night. "I was finally able to get in line and put gas in my car Thursday. I was also able to get through to communications and they told me to come to Baton Rouge. I left for New Orleans Friday morning," he said.

FRIDAY - SUNDAY, SEPT. 2-4: During these days the search and rescue teams concentrated on specific rescue requests as they came in from the command center. "We would get to the mobile command center early in the

morning and get everybody broken into groups," LaCaze said. "Then we would task them out to handle assignments in specific areas."

For Sgt. Jackson, seeing the city he grew up in for the first time since the storm was heartbreaking. "We were launching boats across from city hall and passing by the library where I check out books. Saturday or Sunday I was able to get into my neighborhood and that was even more devastating. To see the businesses I frequented and the homes of friends that were covered in water was extremely traumatic.

"My house was up on brick piers and it still had about two feet of water inside," he said. "I know the streets intimately. I'm in a boat going through neighborhoods that I've been in since I was seven."

MONDAY - WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 5-7: By this time, most of the people that wanted to leave had already been rescued. "By Monday, we were beginning to see there were some that wanted to stay," LaCaze said. "We just kept going back into those areas and found that some people would change their minds."

The command center was also getting caught up with the 911 calls and things were starting to slow down. "We were getting a pretty good handle on the rescues. We knew that we could start downsizing operations and start sending people home that were helping from other state agencies," LaCaze said.

THURSDAY – FRIDAY, SEPT. 8- 9: LDWF started sending people home for good on Sept. 8 and 9. They did, however, keep a small search and rescue task force behind as long as there were still people requesting help. "Most of the area was accessible by vehicle at this point. Plus the military and other agencies were taking control of the situation," LaCaze said.

Rescuing people from a flooded city the size of New Orleans had never been attempted before Katrina came ashore. The total number of rescues by LDWF is estimated to be 21,000.

"We rescued thousands of people," LaCaze said. "In those initial phases we tried to take people's names. I would go around and ask, 'How many do you have?' and they would say, 'I got 300 and something,' and another guy would say, 'I got over 400 people.' It was then that I realized that taking people's names would be next to impossible."

All in all it was an experience that the LDWF search and rescue teams will never forget. "I think we took the initiative and just went forward and helped people. That is all you needed to do," David said.

Kelley said, "It's a good feeling to help people. I think all of us have a desire to do that."

LaCaze said that he was extremely proud of his agents' performance and would like to see every agent receive lifesaver awards. He also said that it was a total team effort and that his agents appreciated the support the rest of the department gave them.

Jackson reiterated this sentiment: "Everybody in our department did a superb job. Morale was high and I didn't hear one complaint. Everybody from top to bottom went way beyond the call of duty."

For more information on the impacts of Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana, please refer to the November/December issue of Louisiana Conservationist Magazine.

Katrina Sets New Benchmark for Alabama Residents

By Kim Nix, Alabama Department of Conservation

Alabama is no stranger to hurricanes. For most residents, Hurricane Frederic, which hit in 1979, is the benchmark. That storm caused extensive damage to the Mobile area including Dauphin Island, just off the coast. In 2004, Hurricane Ivan became the new benchmark. The cities of Orange Beach and Gulf Shores took direct hits, especially at Gulf State Park where the hotel, convention center and public fishing pier were destroyed.

When the warning came that Hurricane Katrina was headed for the Gulf, preparations were quickly made and evacuations mandated for coastal areas. For the most part, evacuation notices were heeded. Interstate 65 from Mobile to Montgomery was opened in both directions so that traffic in all lanes could travel north. A few people, afraid to leave their only possessions, would not evacuate.

As usual, all law enforcement in the coastal area was put on alert. This includes Conservation Enforcement Officers who work for all of the Department's divisions: Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, Marine Police, Marine Resources, State Lands and State Parks. Each has its own area of expertise and was on call for search and rescue as well as law enforcement patrol on land and water.

During the height of the storm, Conservation Department officers stationed in the area rescued approximately 30 people from their homes. Immediately afterward, officers from other parts of the state were sent south to assist with relief efforts and stayed through September.

The State of Mississippi asked for assistance during Labor Day weekend and 55 Conservation and Marine Police officers were deployed to Gulfport. They were not alone, as Conservation Department officers from across the nation responded to the need.

Alabama's officers filled many roles: distributing food and water, traffic control and search and rescue. More than week after the storm had hit, the officers and the U.S. Marine Corps transported food and bottled water to approximately 40 people who were stranded on shrimp boats in the Industrial Canal near Biloxi. The Vietnamese families, who live on the boats, had moved into a protected area to wait out the hurricane. The hurricane collapsed a bridge and trapped them, and they had been without provisions for several days. The officers evacuated one pregnant woman in the group.

A few days after the storm, Alabama Governor Bob Riley and Conservation Commissioner Barnett Lawley devised a plan to house evacuees at state parks. FEMA trailers were brought in and campgrounds became homes to people who had very little. Local communities pitched in to provide food, clothing and toys for children. At one point, more than 1,500 evacuees were living in FEMA trailers in Alabama.

The after-effects of Hurricane Katrina are still being felt in Alabama, but like many times before, buildings will be rebuilt and lives will return to normal.

Normal is what some evacuees haven't had for a long time. As of November 15, more than 1,200 evacuees are still living in 13 state parks in Alabama. Their children are going to local schools and many will find jobs and start their lives over in a new state. Let's hope 2006 brings better times for them.



One of the hardest hit areas of Alabama was the fishing town of Bayou La Batre. (Photo by Billy Pope)



SKILL BUILDING

Maintaining an Open Line of Communication

By Lydia Saldaña, Communications Division Director, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Internal communication efforts often take a back seat to other public information obligations within natural resource agencies, but the success or failure of many priority initiatives often depends on employees across the organization being well informed. If employees feel that reasonable efforts are being made to keep them in the loop, they are more likely to be advocates or at least be in a better position to explain why their agency is pursuing a particular course of action.

Most agencies utilize a number of different tools to communicate with employees, including an Intranet web presence, monthly newsletter, weekly e-mail bulletins and other tools. In Texas, we've been producing a regular video newsletter called *Open Line* since 1990, which has won numerous internal communications awards from the Association for Conservation Information. The focus of this article will be on this video communication effort.

First, what is *Open Line* and why does the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) spend time and money on such a product?

Open Line is a half-hour magazine-format television show that is produced twice a year and distributed to agency employees. There is one producer assigned to the program, although several other TPWD video producers contribute to its production. The operating budget including producer salary is roughly \$60,000 a year. The program aims to make sure TPWD employees know what the top priority initiatives are for the agency, helps manage morale by keeping employees in the loop and also aims to keep employees focused on the agency's mission.

The first edition of *Open Line* was produced and distributed in 1990 and was part of a major change in agency culture that occurred when a new executive director was brought in to lead TPWD. That change in leadership occurred during a time when the agency was rocked by scandal and morale was at a low point. The executive director wanted to improve morale and open up lines of communication from headquarters in Austin to the many field offices and state parks throughout Texas.

We scratched out the first program outline on a big legal pad after a brainstorming session in the executive office, and while we've made some tweaks over the years, the basic format has remained the same. Feedback from employees has been positive from the very first program. We provide survey forms with each edition and utilize that feedback in planning the next program. Each program's content is developed by the producer, the Media Productions Director and the Communications Division Director. We discuss content with the executive director before beginning each production cycle. Production values on the program are consistent with the high production values that are a hallmark of other TPWD video projects.

Each edition of the program features a lead story, a newsmakers segment, an interview with the executive director and a final feature story. We've also added a new "Voices from the Field" segment this year, which has garnered some positive feedback from staff.

The lead story is an in-depth look at a priority project or issue. In the latest edition of our newsletter, we focused attention on the outcome of the legislative session, including some significant budget issues in state parks. We don't shy away from tough questions, and employees we interview aren't afraid to express their opinions on key issues.

The Newsmakers segment features a roundup of news items from across all divisions. We make sure to cover as many divisions as possible in each edition to cover all bases and to make sure all employees find something of relevance to them.

The interview with the executive director is a five-minute exchange between the executive director and the communications director. The questions (and answers) are unscripted and candid. Employee feedback on this segment has been consistently positive over the years. Employees appreciate hearing directly from the executive director on priority issues of the day.

The final feature is an in-depth profile of an agency employee or employees. The last issue of *Open Line* featured a profile of two game wardens who are accomplished artists. The wardens also happen to be father and son, which made for a very interesting story. That particular segment had originally been produced as part of our PBS television series. Whenever possible, we re-purpose material from our PBS show or our video news report (VNR) program to run in *Open Line*. In the most recent edition of *Open Line* we interviewed many of the wardens who participated in rescue operations for hurricanes Katrina and Rita. We utilized footage the wardens had shot on camcorders, along with material video staff had gathered for a video news report. The segment intercuts that footage with comments from wardens and is a powerful piece of communication that lets all employees know what it was like to be involved in a national crisis.

Our newest regular segment of the show is called "Voices from the Field." It is a compilation of comments from employees all over the state and across all divisions. All video producers are involved in this segment. As segments are produced for our PBS shows or for VNRs, producers ask various employees a series of questions for use in *Open Line*. It is a cost-effective way to utilize existing resources to add depth to the program. Initial feedback from employees has been extremely positive.

After 15 years in production, *Open Line* is now part of the TPWD culture. Employees view it during staff meetings at various locations around the state. At Austin headquarters, a "Town Meeting" is scheduled for all employees to view the latest edition along with the executive director, who then opens the floor up to any questions employees may have. As technology continues to improve, we will continue to explore alternative methods of distributing the program. In the meantime, we will continue mailing hard copy VHS tapes out to several hundred field offices, state parks, fish hatcheries and wildlife management areas.

Open Line is one of many tools we utilize at Texas Parks and Wildlife to do the best job we can of communicating with employees. A videotape can never take the place of good person-to-person or chain of command communication, but it can enhance and supplement other internal communication efforts. Like many agencies across the country, TPWD has had to tighten its belt and we've had to make some tough choices in cutting back programs and in some cases, people. However, internal communications continues to be a priority, and we consider *Open Line* to be an efficient and effective way to keep TPWD employees in the loop.



TEAMING WITH WILDLIFE UPDATE

Teaming with Wildlife: A Natural Investment

By Rebecca Brooke, IAFWA

Did you know the average person needs to hear the same message seven times before they will remember it?

As communicators, we work to get our messages out in a clear and memorable manner. One simple and powerful way to achieve this is through repetition. People lead busy lives, and remembering what is on the grocery list, much less what we just heard on the radio or read in the news, can be a struggle. Communicating a message takes persistence and dedication. Teaming with Wildlife is no stranger to this idea. With your help, Teaming is now in the midst of a national outreach initiative to educate key decision-makers and the public about the state wildlife action plans. A persistent, unified message is one of the key ingredients to making this a success.

In the past four months, over 400 people from 47 states have been presented with polling and messaging information on the state wildlife action plans. Using the information from these message trainings and the *State Wildlife Action Plan Message Kit*, (available at www.teaming.com) the state fish and wildlife agencies now have the opportunity to present a set of consistent and tested statements about the wildlife action plans:

- Clean air and water
- Healthy wildlife and people
- The conservation of wildlife and vital natural areas for future generations

These are the type of simple and compelling statements to express.

Over the next several months, we hope you will put these messages to use in magazine articles, op-eds and editorials in your state. Many states whose action plans have been approved have successfully generated media attention through a press release to celebrate the occasion. Some states, like Missouri, have already printed cover stories in their fish and wildlife magazines on their wildlife action plan, while others will run articles in early 2006. Through this effort, key decision-makers and people in communities across the nation will begin to recognize the importance of the wildlife action plans.

Making an analogy to a popular game played on the Jersey shore, Martin Hamburger of Laguens Hamburger Kully and Klose says "It's like wack-a-mole. When the mole sticks its nose out of the hole, you've got to hit it with your hammer. When people stick their nose into a newspaper or turn on the TV, you've got to hit them with your message."

A national press event with Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton in early November provided an opportunity for many states to get out their "hammers" and set to work spreading the message. Secretary Norton was joined by Fish and Wildlife Service Director, Dale Hall and IAFWA President, John Cooper in announcing the submission of wildlife action plans by all 56 states and territories.

"These plans represent a future for conservation in America that is rooted in cooperation and partnership between the federal government and states, tribes, local governments, conservation groups, private landowners and others with a commitment to the health of our land and water, fish and wildlife," said Norton.

The Secretary's remarks have led to news articles on the wildlife action plans in at least a dozen states. For more quotes from the Secretary and other national conservation figures, or to see articles from the event, you can visit the Teaming Newsroom at www.teaming.com.

Teaming with Wildlife is preparing to grow in new ways in 2006. A coalition-building workshop in mid-November brought together 70 people from 36 states to begin the work of engaging and expanding the 3,000-strong Teaming with Wildlife Coalition. Outreach to new partners in 2006 will help support the implementation of the state wildlife action plan and strengthen advocacy efforts.

"Each state has a goal of 100 members by Labor Day, which would result in a national coalition of 5,000 organizations," says Bill Geer, of the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. "Such an impressive array of diverse interests coming together to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered will be a true accomplishment."

Immediately prior to the annual Teaming with Wildlife Fly-In, a second coalition workshop will be taking place February 27 and 28 in Washington D.C. The Fly-In is a great opportunity to share some of the media coverage your state's wildlife action plan has received with elected representatives on Capitol Hill. You can help this happen by sharing the articles, op-eds, and editorials you've generated about the wildlife action plans with the people traveling to D.C. for the Fly-In.

"There has already been some great press coverage on the wildlife action plans," says Naomi Edelson of IAFWA. "We've got to be persistent in our efforts to inform people about the benefits of these plans—both for themselves and for wildlife."



UPCOMING EVENTS & DEADLINES

2006 ACI Conference

Mark your calendars and make plans now to attend the 2006 ACI Conference in the Sunshine State! Scott Ball, Joy Hill and the staff of the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission are planning a great lineup of events for July 16 – 20, 2006. The Conference will be held at the Sheraton Safari in Lake Buena Vista, just outside Orlando and Disney World. The hotel has agreed to a \$99 per night rate which they will extend for three days before and after the conference. This is a great opportunity to bring your family down for a little Disney World Fun. More information on conference programs and events will be forthcoming. If you have ideas for presentations that would be useful to you in your job or for programs you'd like to present on, please contact Scott Ball at Scott.Ball@MyFWC.com.

Southeast Deer Study Group Annual Meeting, February 5 – 8, 2006, Baton Rouge, LA

TWW Coalition Workshop, February 27 & 28, Washington, D.C.

TWW Fly-In, March 1, 2 & 3, Washington, D.C.

71st North American Wildlife & Natural Resources Conference, March 22 – 25, 2006, Columbus, OH



MEMBER NEWS

The Outdoor Channel's PR Director Assumes Conservation Responsibilities

Management of The Outdoor Channel (TOC) announces that Chris Chaffin, Director of Public Relations, is taking on additional responsibilities to work with the wildlife conservation industry, agencies and organizations and has been promoted to the position of Senior Director of Public Relations and Conservation, effective immediately.

"The Outdoor Channel fully believes that sportsmen are the first and best conservationists," said Andy Dale, TOC President and CEO "And it is a very natural extension for us to do more to promote conservation and encourage our viewers to be actively involved in conserving both wildlife and our outdoor heritage. Chaffin's extensive experience in wildlife conservation and the outdoor industry, combined with his commitment to sportsmen and wildlife, will most certainly help facilitate our efforts to have a more positive impact on the outdoor world."

Chaffin has been with The Outdoor Channel for three years and spent more than 25 years working in wildlife management and building partnerships in the outdoor industry.

Dale said TOC feels strongly about being a vital part of the outdoor industry. "This expansion of responsibilities reflects our commitment to the outdoors, to hunters, fishermen, shooters and to the nation's wildlife resources."

Chaffin may be contacted at (321) 729-0280 or by email at cchaffin@outdoorchannel.com.

Kathleen Jamison Bids Adieu....But Not for Long!

Kathleen Jamison is ending her 27-year career with the Delaware Department of Natural Resources' I&E Office on Feb. 28, 2006. The Outdoor Delaware editor plans to commute between The First State and the Clearwater area of Florida's Gulf Coast – hurricanes be damned – and looks forward to visits from ACI friends. (Illinois retiree Gary Thomas has already booked the guest room for most of the winter!)

"My first ACI meeting was during the infamous 1980 blizzard in Virginia Beach and friends I made then and since have been incredibly important to my professional and personal life. I won't say goodbye, because once an ACIer, always an ACIer." After she takes a few months off and buys her first PC (overcoming years of Luddite inclinations), she's thinking about looking for freelance writing jobs, maybe with the newly revived Florida Wildlife Magazine. (Scott Ball, please note.)

-END Winter2005-06 TBW ISSUE-