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Commentary

The Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana



Earth Day – Article 2 Growing the Water Economy

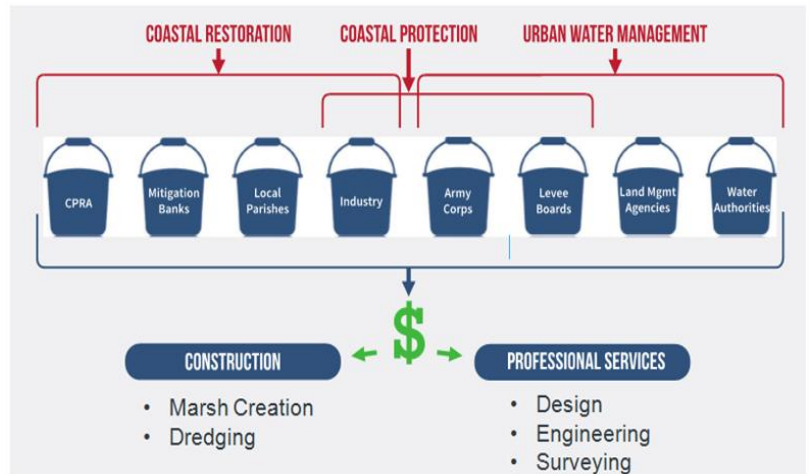
Louisiana's coast, with its ports and energy infrastructure, is important to the state and the national economy. What is becoming clearer is just how significant the coastal restoration effort is to the state's economy.

A joint LSU/Louisiana Workforce Commission study found that the \$618 million spent by the state in 2010 on coastal restoration created 4,880 direct jobs and an additional 4,020 indirect and induced jobs. The study estimated that the state's initial investment in 2010 created more than \$1.1 billion in sales.

More broadly, water management is a larger economic sector than many people realize. It includes protection (for example, levees) coastal restoration (such as diversions) and urban water management (water supply, drainage and sewage). The regional economic development group GNO Inc. estimates that the water management sector employs more than 30,000 people in the greater New Orleans area and they expect that number to grow by more than 20% over the next decade.

These jobs are not restricted to biologists and engineers with advanced degrees. The Data Center estimates that of the top 20 jobs in water management, half do not require a college education. These include pipefitters, steamfitters, carpenters and computer support specialists. Jobs in these categories pay a wage ranging from \$14 to \$30+ per hour.

If Louisiana's educational resources cannot provide the necessary preparation and training for citizens to fill these jobs, as well as the engineers and other positions that require a bachelor's degree or more, then much of the work will be filled by out-of-state contractors instead.



Source: The Data Center

Fortunately, Louisiana colleges and universities are providing educational programs to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary to work in the modern water economy. These include:

- Louisiana State University's College of the Coast and Environment
- University of New Orleans' Coastal Education Program and Coastal Education Research Facility (CERF)
- Nicholls State's Coastal Restoration Program
- McNeese State's Ecology and Management of Wetland Wildlife program
- University of Louisiana Lafayette's Institute for Coastal and Water Research (ICaWR)
- Tulane's Department of River-Coastal Science and Engineering (RCSE)

These are the types of programs, along with the specialized skills taught at community and technical colleges, that will help Louisiana harness the power of coastal protection and restoration work to grow the Louisiana economy. In addition, research and development programs at these institutions and organizations like the Water Institute and the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy help create a critical mass of expertise and innovation in Louisiana. This knowledge base gives the state a comparative advantage when growing and attracting businesses related to water management.

Recommendation

The Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, the Louisiana Workforce Commission, higher education and the business community should work together to ensure strong training programs and an intellectual and workforce infrastructure to meet the varied needs of Louisiana's growing water management economy.