

# Retired official's Web site seeks coastal research

BY AMY WOLD  
Advocate staff writer

After serving with the Governor's Office of Coastal Activities under five governors, Len Bahr recently retired as the director of the Governor's Applied Coastal Science Program.



Bahr

Ironically, Bahr said he hopes his retirement will give him a chance to get more involved in the ongoing discussion about Louisiana's coastal restoration and protection efforts.

His vehicle for doing this is a new Web site he's creating at <http://www.lacoastpost.com>.

"I've been so frustrated because I've kind of lost my voice in policy, science and coastal restoration," Bahr said.

"I always thought, when I retired, I wanted to get that voice back."

A way to do that came to him as he watched the 2008 presidential elections unfold.

He noticed a heightened level of discussion on the Internet through interactive postings, blogs and Web sites, he said.

That type of interactive discussion is something he has long thought was needed as the state worked toward developing action plans for coastal restoration and protection, he said.

So he says he started thinking about doing a Web site/blog/submitted article site on the Internet — he's still tinkering with the format — where not only Bahr will write, but where scientists, experts and other interested parties could submit articles as well.

With help from an LSU biology student, the site went online Monday.

"Now I'm recruiting contributors," Bahr said. "I really want to discuss issues that haven't gotten much attention or have fallen through the cracks."

Such issues include climate change, sea level rise, coastal forests and how the state should deal with logging in these areas, as well as the annual low-oxygen "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico and how that influences coastal restoration, he said.

Bahr also wants more discus-

sion about how to better match proposed coastal restoration solutions to the sheer size of coastal restoration problem, he said.

"We've never thought big enough about coastal restoration," Bahr said.

The coastal Louisiana restoration discussion has focused too little on the need to know more about the impact to the Mississippi River of diverting large amounts of its water into coastal marshes, he said.

"We've just started scratching the surface of dealing with the river," Bahr said.

Researchers are just now starting to do the necessary river science, Bahr said.

Things that still need to be investigated include how major diversions may affect navigation or future dredging of the river, and how much sediment the river actually carries that can be used for restoration purposes, he said.

He said he hopes the Web site will bring more voices to the coastal restoration discussion.

"I want to provide a forum for people to talk about ideas," Bahr said.

Another issue he said he hopes the site will generate a better look at is the need for state and federal partners to take a step back, look at the big picture of what coastal Louisiana should be in the future, then design projects to make that happen, he said.

Instead, he said, it seems the coastal restoration process is stuck in a model of designing projects, then going forward to build them, regardless or whether conditions have changed or not.

It's a model found in the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act—a federal/state program that receives annual funding to do coastal restoration projects.

These projects take many years to get through the approval process and are considered relatively small projects that are put in place largely independent of any other restoration project.

"Following Katrina, I think I was really naïve. I thought that would make a difference," Bahr said, "that we would start looking at the bigger picture, but it didn't happen."