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Virtual Tour Highlights Importance of Wetlands for Coastal Cities

The Lower 9th Ward neighborhood provides backdrop to better understand the relationship between Louisiana's coast and the sustainability of its communities.

The Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development (CSED), National Audubon Society, and the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana (CRCL) are proud to release a [virtual tour](#) highlighting the significance of a healthy coast as part of a healthy community. Told through local voices, the tour examines key areas and infrastructure surrounding the Lower 9th Ward community that have a direct role in providing protection from damaging winds and water driven by tropical storms and hurricanes.

This video is one effort in a series aimed at engaging Communities Restoring Urban Swamp Habitat (CRUSH), a project of CRCL. Started in 2018, the CRUSH series uses a multi-pronged approach to spreading awareness, advocating for healthy wetlands, and engaging volunteers to restore local swamps by planting cypress and other trees.

Corey Miller, Director of Community Resilience for CRCL, explained, "The best chance for the long-term sustainability of coastal communities requires a broad awareness of the challenges and engagement of our residents in a never-ending commitment to address the threats of climate change and hurricanes."

The release of the video coincides with the 15th anniversaries of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita making landfall along Louisiana's coast. The devastation to the Lower 9th Ward community was, among other things, a direct result of years of complacency and disregard for the vital role that healthy wetlands play as part of a comprehensive system to reduce storm surge and flood risk.

The Multiple Lines of Defense System (MLODS) relies on a mix of natural infrastructure (cypress swamps and wetlands), structural protection (levees, drainage pumps and floodgates), and individual measures (home elevation, flood insurance, etc.) that combine to reduce the potential for flooding. The virtual tour highlights how the MLODS system failed during Katrina with devastating results and how various restoration and volunteer opportunities are now working to strengthen the system.

The virtual tour was developed in partnership with a local community-based organization -- CSED, a statewide coastal restoration nonprofit -- CRCL, and a local chapter of the National Audubon Society. Arthur Johnson, CEO of CSED, said, "This video is a unique example of nonprofit collaboration, bridging urban water management with coastal restoration, all driven by community advocacy and volunteerism." The collaboration demonstrates to the residents of the Lower 9 that they are neither forgotten nor alone in their fight for a healthy, sustainable community.

Beyond the community, the video will serve as a communication tool to spread awareness of the needs that remain and as an example of the importance of restoring coastal wetlands as part of a strong defense against future storms. Charles Allen, Audubon Louisiana's Community Engagement Director and former 9th ward resident, said, "For this community and the greater New Orleans area, we need residents to understand that healthy swamps and wetlands are not only important habitat for birds and other wildlife, but also critical for the protection and sustainability of our communities, residents, and future generations"

We hope that you find the [virtual tour](#) entertaining and enlightening. The CRUSH series was made possible by funding from Entergy New Orleans and the Environmental Protection Agency: Gulf of Mexico Program.