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Governor, National Academy of Sciences leader to speak at SOC

NEW ORLEANS – Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards and National Academy of Sciences President Marcia McNutt are among the luminaries who will speak at the State of the Coast conference, which will be from May 26 to 28 at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans. The theme of this year’s conference is “Investing In Our Future.”

Other plenary speakers confirmed for State of the Coast are former Sen. John Breaux, the sponsor of CWPPRA, AKA the Breaux Act, which funds coastal restoration and protection projects; Sen. Bill Cassidy, the senior senator from Louisiana who led an effort to provide free health care to Hurricane Katrina evacuees in 2005; Rep. Garret Graves of Louisiana, a Baton Rouge native who serves on the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis and who has been a leader on coastal restoration efforts; Rick Knabb, a hurricane expert and on-air personality at The Weather Channel who is the former director of the National Hurricane Center; Richard Campanella, a geographer and associate dean at the Tulane University School of Architecture; and Kate Orff, a landscape architect and MacArthur Genius Grant recipient who has made addressing climate change a key component of her work.

The State of the Coast is the largest statewide conference of its kind, providing an interdisciplinary forum to exchange timely and relevant information on the dynamic conditions of Louisiana’s coastal communities, environment, and economy. The Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, The Water Institute of the Gulf, the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana and Louisiana Sea Grant have partnered to produce this forum, the need for which grows with every acre of land lost to the Gulf of Mexico.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the first Earth Day; the 30th anniversary of the passage of Coastal Wetlands, Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act; the 15th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina and Rita; and the 10th anniversary of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and subsequent disaster. These events will be focal points of the conference.

“We need to consider how we invest in science and innovation as we mark these important anniversaries,” said CRCL Executive Director Kimberly Davis Reyher. “The State of the Coast conference will connect experts from critical disciplines and leaders from across the political spectrum to consider together how we can thrive in coastal Louisiana well into the future.”
State of the Coast will consist of two and a half days of keynote presentations, poster sessions, and networking opportunities, as well as presentations by leading national and local experts in concurrent sessions, representing a diversity of sectors, including academia, government, economic development and NGOs. More than 1,300 people are expected to attend. Registration is open. Sponsorship opportunities are available. More information can be found on the conference website.

**John Bel Edwards** is the 56th governor of Louisiana, a state on the front lines of coastal land loss. He is a native of Amite in Tangipahoa Parish and graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point. He served on active duty in the Army for eight years. After his service, Edwards received a law degree from LSU. He was elected to the Louisiana House of Representatives in 2008 and became governor in 2016. He was sworn in for a second term in January 2020. More coastal restoration projects have been implemented during his administration than ever before, and much of the money set aside for coastal projects after the Deepwater Horizon disaster will be allocated under his authority.

**Sen. Bill Cassidy** is the senior senator from Louisiana. Cassidy, a medical doctor, co-founded a clinic that provides free dental and health care to the uninsured. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Bill led a group of health care volunteers who opened an emergency health care facility, providing basic care to evacuees. In the U.S. House, Cassidy served on the Energy and Commerce Committee and supported a conservative agenda. In the Senate, he serves on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, among other committee assignments. Cassidy supports natural gas development as a strategy to lower greenhouse gas emissions.

**Rep. Garret Graves** is the U.S. House member from Baton Rouge. He served as chairman of the Louisiana Coastal Restoration and Protection Authority during the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and aftermath, and he has championed flood protection and coastal restoration projects on Capitol Hill. He is the ranking Republican on the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis.

**Marcia McNutt** is a geophysicist and the president of the National Academy of Sciences. From 2013 to 2016, she was editor-in-chief of Science journals. McNutt was director of the U.S. Geological Survey from 2009 to 2013, during which time USGS responded to a number of major disasters, including the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. For her work to help contain that spill, McNutt was awarded the Coast Guard’s Meritorious Service Medal. In 1998, McNutt was awarded the AGU Macelwane Medal for research accomplishments by a young scientist, and she received the Maurice Ewing Medal in 2007 for her contributions to deep-sea exploration.

**Kate Orff** is the founding principal of SCAPE, a landscape architecture and urban design firm based in New York and New Orleans. She is also a professor and director of the urban design program at Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, where she co-directs the Center for Resilient Cities and Landscapes. She focuses on retooling the practice of landscape architecture and urban design relative to the uncertainty of climate change and creating spaces to foster social life. In 2019, she was elevated to the American Society of Landscape Architects Council of Fellows, and in 2017, she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship – the first given in the field of landscape architecture.

**Rick Knabb** is The Weather Channel’s on-air hurricane expert and tropical program manager. Knabb leads hurricane and tropical storm reporting and provides expert in-depth forecast analyses and updates.
for the network. Knabb was the director of the National Hurricane Center in Miami from 2012 to 2017. While at the NHC, he oversaw development of various programs implemented to change the way the public understands and is warned about hurricanes, tropical cyclones and their impacts. During his tenure at The Weather Channel and the NHC, Knabb has covered, forecast or led that teams that forecast every major Atlantic hurricane in the past 15 years.

**John Breaux** served the state of Louisiana on Capitol Hill for 35 years, first as a member of the House of Representatives, where he served on the Subcommittee on the Conservation of Wildlife, Fisheries and the Environment, and later in the Senate, where he served on the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee. Breaux was the architect and chief sponsor of the Coastal Wetlands, Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act, aka the Breaux Act, landmark legislation that became law 30 years ago. The Breaux Act provided the first significant funding for restoration projects and set in motion the process that led to the creation of the state’s master plan for protecting the coast.

**Richard Campanella** is a professor of geography in the Tulane University School of Architecture and the author of 11 books and more than 220 articles on the geography, history, architecture and culture of New Orleans and vicinity. He is the only two-time winner of the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities Book of the Year Award and has received many other awards including the Louisiana Literary Award, the Williams Prize and the Hannah Arendt Prize for Scholarship in the Public Interest. In 2016, the government of France named Campanella a knight in the Order of the Academic Palms.

For media inquiries involving State of the Coast speakers, contact Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana Communications and Marketing Director James Karst at james.karst@crcl.org or 504-220-7899.

For up-to-date information about the conference, including sponsorship opportunities, see the conference website: stateofthecoast.org.

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The Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana was the first statewide nonprofit in Louisiana dedicated to coastal restoration.

The Water Institute of the Gulf is an institution that connects academic, public and private researchers and conducts applied research to serve communities and industry.

The Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority is a state agency that directs Louisiana’s coastal priorities and implements restoration projects large and small.

Louisiana Sea Grant is a college program based at LSU that promotes stewardship of the state’s coastal resources through a combination of research, education and outreach.