
STRATEGIC CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT OF
GULF COAST LANDSCAPES

**LOUISIANA
COASTAL
PROTECTION
AND
RESTORATION
AUTHORITY
USE CASE STUDY**

December 2021

LOUISIANA COASTAL PROTECTION AND RESTORATION AUTHORITY

Conservation Geography: Louisiana
Primary Stakeholder: Honora Buras

Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) is a single state government entity established to focus development and implementation efforts to achieve comprehensive coastal protection for Louisiana. Since 2007, CPRA efforts have resulted in numerous accomplishments, including the conservation of 40,708 acres of coastal forests through the Coastal Forest Conservation Initiative, benefits to 48,894 acres of land through restoration projects, improvement of 336 miles of levee, and construction of 60 miles of barrier islands and berms. CPRA recognizes the importance of investing in additional initiatives beyond physical efforts, so they also are dedicated to fostering education and building cooperation and understanding among the people of coastal Louisiana.










Use Case Study Purpose:
*Comparing sites for a proposed National Estuarine
Research Reserve (NERR).*

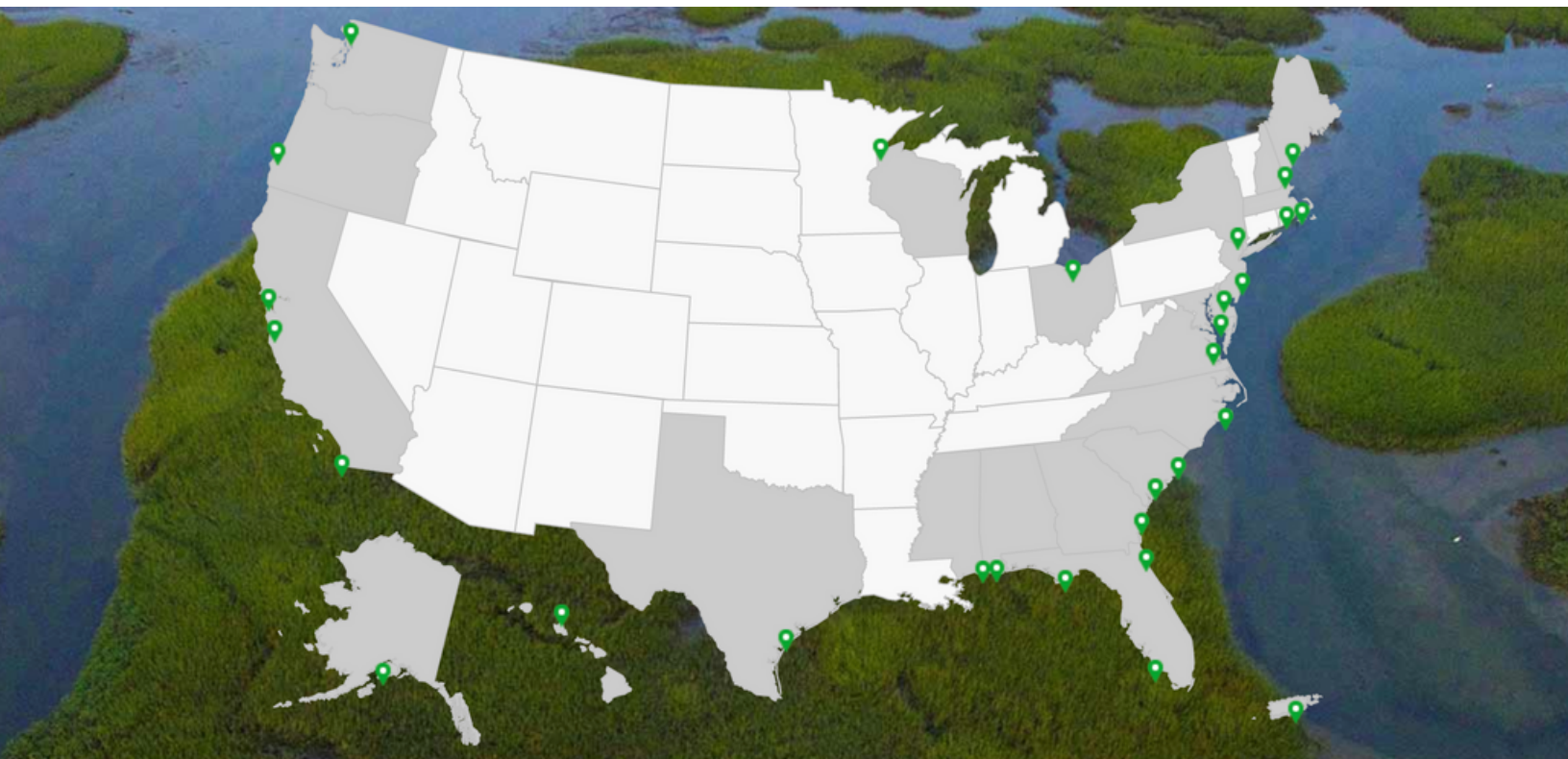
CPRA met several of the Strategic Conservation Assessment of Gulf Coast Landscape's (SCA's) Use Case Study selection criteria (see below), and represented a unique opportunity to apply the SCA tools in a National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) designation effort in Louisiana. The primary stakeholder was **Honora Buras**, a CPRA Senior Coastal Resources Scientist. During the working sessions, her GIS counterparts at Louisiana State University (LSU), **R. Hampton Peele** and **DeWitt Braud** also often joined. Others engaged from the NERR Leadership Team included **Dr. Robert Twilley**, Director of LSU SeaGrant, and **Morgan Crutcher**, from the Governor's Office of Coastal Activities.

The SCA Team (hereafter we) launched this Use Case Study with an initial scoping call in September 2020. In describing her main goal for this Use Case Study, Honora said:

“Initially it was hoped that the NERR Selection Criteria could be modified/adapted to the measures in the tool, and the tools could be used in the development, evaluation, screening, and optimization of the site proposals.”

Use Case Study Selection Criteria

-  focuses on the acquisition or easement of land (land conservation; not restoration)
-  exhibits a transferable issue that could be experienced by other areas in the region
-  represents an application scale that fits into the hexagonal framework of the SCA project
-  represents a diversity of agency type / mission
-  fits within the existing RESTORE Council goal framework
-  focuses in an area that complements the geographic diversity of the SCA region
-  has planning or funding decisions going to be made within the SCA project timeline



Honora had previously learned about the tools from the SCA charrette series and from her role as the CPRA representative on the SCA Core Working Group. Her familiarity with the tools and their functionalities gave her the idea of applying them to one of her ongoing projects: the proposal of a NERR in Louisiana. The NERR System is a network of 29 coastal sites in the United States that were established and are managed by partnerships between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and coastal states. These sites are considered living laboratories and are meant to study and protect estuarine systems through education, training, long-term research, and coastal stewardship. **Louisiana is the only coastal state in the Gulf Coast Region without a NERR.**

There are six main steps in the NERR designation process: 1) letter of interest, 2) site selection and nomination, 3) draft environmental impact statement and draft management plan, 4) final environmental impact statement and final management plan, 5) designation findings and certificate; record of decision, and 6) designation ceremony. **When we connected with Honora on this Use Case Study, the designation process was at step 2.**

To propose a NERR site for designation, the state in which the site is being proposed must first develop a process to create a list of site selection criteria including NOAA's basic criteria and anything additional that may aid in the evaluation and justification of the site. Once finalized, this list must be submitted to NOAA for review and approval. To aid Honora and the NERR Site Development Committee in reviewing NOAA's criteria and considering others, we had several working sessions during which we reviewed the specifics of NOAA's basic site selection criteria and the data measures included in the SCA tools. **During those working sessions, Honora and the team asked excellent questions and provided valuable feedback regarding the backend calculations of the SCA data measures.**





During our December 2020 and January 2021 working sessions, we developed and reviewed a cross-walk spreadsheet with Honora and the team that showed potential alignments between NOAA's site selection criteria and the SCA data measures. **This effort allowed us to determine how we could support Honora and the NERR Proposal Teams, Site Development Committee, and Screening Subcommittee with the current tool functionalities and identify opportunities for expansion to better align with similar efforts in the future.** At the conclusion of our last working session, it was determined that the tools and associated documentation could be supportive in a two-part process: 1) use the cross-walk spreadsheet to provide more information about the SCA measures, ultimately to assist in the finalization of site selection criteria, and 2) once the criteria are finalized and approved, the SCA Team would be available to teach the proposal teams and site screening committee how to run iterative analyses in the **Conservation Prioritization Tool** to evaluate the proposed sites. As with all large projects, the NERR site selection process experienced some delays, and scheduling constraints limited further diffusion of SCA tool knowledge and application into the larger NERR site proposal teams and leadership. Thus, since the SCA tools were not formally integrated into the site selection process, we are not currently collaborating on this effort.

In every working session and engagement activity, Honora and her team brought **incredible energy, knowledge, and dedication**. Hampton and DeWitt applied their expertise regarding GIS and statistics to dive deep into and provide thorough feedback on the tools, their calculations, and the resulting reports. Their feedback will be incorporated into future versions of the tools to improve functionality and the user interface. To ensure a co-production approach through the completion of the Use Case Study, Honora was asked to answer several questions regarding the overall process.

Why were you interested in becoming a Use Case Study?

“I thought the suite of tools would be useful in developing and evaluating site proposals for a National Estuarine Research Reserve in Louisiana and this would be an opportunity to see how well the tool measures could be used to reflect/modify the NOAA Site Criteria.”

What did you enjoy about this process?

“I enjoyed working with the entire SCA team and their enthusiastic support and flexibility in working with me on a project that had an ever changing site development planning process and schedule. Having someone on the SCA team with NERR experience was extremely helpful. I really appreciated the deep dive the team took into aligning the tool measures with the NERR criteria and working closely with the SeaGrant GIS staff to go behind the scenes into the underlying processes. The SCA team bent over backwards to address any concerns or questions. It was a true pleasure to work with the team.”

How do you think this process could be improved?

“Getting the leadership of the Site Development Team to be engaged in and supportive of the process and allowing integration of the tool suite into the full SDT process along the way would have been a tremendous improvement. The initial planned schedule was delayed considerably for the first year, which significantly compressed the various groups' work, allowing very little time and opportunity for me to engage them in the use of the SCA tools. Since Hurricane Ida caused significant delays in the planned scoping and refinement of the proposals, there may still be time to integrate the use of the tools into the remaining steps of the NERR process.”



This was a unique Use Case Study in that we were essentially evaluating the ability of the SCA tools to support the NERR designation process through the site selection step. This effort was brand new territory for most of the stakeholders involved, both from the CPRA and SCA sides. National site designation processes typically involve several steps and numerous decision makers, which ultimately makes the effort incredibly complex and dynamic. **We all learned valuable lessons along the way, including the importance of preparation, adaptability, and patience when working with intricacies of the NERR site selection process.** Although there are no final products to share from this Use Case Study, Honora still feels accomplishments were made:

“I became much more familiar with the SCA tools and learned of their strengths and limitations. I will definitely use them in other efforts.”

This Use Case Study is currently considered complete, though we may still connect with Honora and/or the NERR team in the future if they wish to integrate the SCA tools in the next steps of their site selection process.

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