

Officials learn about district needs

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The “freshman” students attended their first day of classes Tuesday in the new Louisiana Levee School at LSU to learn more about the art and skill of running a levee district.

The Levee School — officially called the Flood Protection and Ecosystem Restoration Professional Development Program — was established as a direct result of the 2005 hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The purpose is to give levee board members and other parish officials an overview of the issues they’ll face as they design, build and maintain flood protection for their districts.

Flood control, coastal restoration and hurricane protection are very complex subjects, said William Jenkins, former president of the Louisiana State University System.

LSU levee school opens

“If we collectively think we have the (one) solution,” Jenkins said, “we’re wrong.”

Now is the time to move forward with coastal restoration and improved levee protection and integrate any solutions to better protect Louisiana’s coastal communities, he said.

“And I can ask this as a retiree: Why haven’t we done anything about it for the past 50 years?” he asked.

“The answer doesn’t lie with a levee or a marsh or a pump,” said Bruce Thompson, a New Orleans businessman who is a member of the Flood Protection Alliance, a business-oriented advocacy group, and one of the originators of the Levee School idea.

Instead, the answer will come from a process that examines flood protection as a system, he said.

“The last question (I get) is: Will there be a test? I submit when you go home, you’ll be tested every day,” he told the

levee board members, directors and state and federal officials at the meeting.

The three-day Levee School curriculum focused Tuesday on the policy and administrative issues that flood protection agencies face.

The day started with a presentation on the state's comprehensive master plan for coastal restoration and hurricane protection that was approved earlier this year by the Legislature.

Part of that presentation was a reminder that many levee districts operate in a changing landscape as the state continues to lose coastal land.

Since the 1930s, Louisiana has lost 1,900 square miles of coastal land to erosion, subsidence and many other factors, said Sidney Coffee, the governor's executive assistant for coastal activities.

"Our situation has long been an urgent one," Coffee said.

Today, the Levee School will focus on structural water control, including levees, floodgates and floodwalls. Thursday's courses will focus on non-structural solutions, such as wetland restoration, computer modeling of potential flooding hazards and climate forecasting.

The Levee School was organized and funded through the state Department of Natural Resources, the state Department of Transportation and Development, the LSU Agricultural Center and Louisiana Sea Grant.

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